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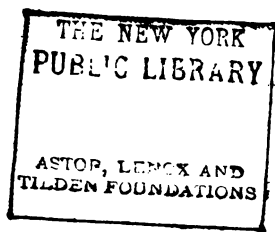


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Mack

NZ



"And the princess of the forest, that you are telling me about, Daphne, what did she wear?"
"Tatters and rags," said Daphne, "and a cobweb cloak."

HE COBWEB CLOAK

BY

HELEN MACKAY

Author of "Houses of Glass,"

"Half Loaves," etc.

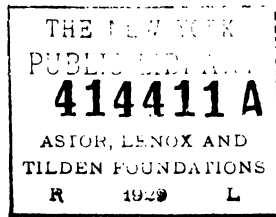
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PART I

THE COBWEB CLOAK

I

Down in the valley the whip-poor-will was calling. His sad, lonely call came in at the nursery windows, with all the rest of the night, with the voices of locusts and katy-dids, and of tree toads, and of newts and frogs from the swamp, and with all the garden's utter sweetness of lilies and roses and syringa bloom, and with the beautiful flood of moonlight.

A very little girl, pig-tailed and pinafores, was eating her supper at a little table in the middle of a big nursery. There was one candle on the table, very tall and white, in a tall silver sconce. The light of the candle was golden and warm in the silver coolness of the moonlight.

The little girl was eating bread and milk in a silver porringer with a spoon that had her name engraved on the handle.

Her name was Marah. It was a very sad name, and she was a very, very happy little girl.

She had been out all day in the swamp. She and her nurse, Bridget Quinn, had taken their lunch down there in a little tin pail, and Bridget had taken the stockings to darn. Bridget Quinn always took along with them, wherever they went, the stockings to darn, but she never did any darning. She was very old. She had been Daphne's nurse too: Daphne was Marah's mother. Bridget Quinn was still her nurse almost as much as Marah's. When she, Bridget Quinn, and Marah went, as they did every winter, to town, to stay with Marah's father, Aunt Margaret, who lived with Marah's father and "was a hand to manage," found fault because Bridget Quinn never did anything. But she did, she made Marah happy.

They had gone down to the swamp pool, and to their favourite log, that was all grown over with moss and lichen and fern, and where, in and about, there lived many beautiful little creatures, emerald beetles and ruby red spiders, and white moths that slept by day with soft wings folded.

Bridget sat on the log and sang to herself half in Gaelic as was her way, her feet keeping time to the tunes as though they remembered their youth's dancing, and did not darn the stockings and paid no attention whatever to Marah. Marah had wandered about in the swamp, very wet and muddy and happy. There was deep velvet black shade, and there was deep velvet gold sunshine; and all the good fragrances of the world were there; and there were birds and butterflies and dragon flies and water spiders and snakes and tadpoles in the pools; and all sorts of little wild people like that, — and like the orchids. Marah always had a strange feeling about the orchids.

There was the snowy orchis, purple-pink, touched with white; and the big purple fringed orchis; and the Indian moccasin; and the little yellow whip-poor-will's shoe, deliciously fragrant.

By-and-by came up the grave question as to what one should choose, of all the wonderful things, to take home with one in the little empty tin lunch pail,— orchids and cinnamon fern and maidenhair, set in deep wet mosses, or live tad-

poles with plenty of mud and water weeds to make them feel at their ease in the pail.

Marah had chosen the tadpoles,— because they were not beautiful like the orchids, and so would be more apt to have their feelings hurt if they were left behind.

Now, as she sat at supper, the tin pail, wherein they were to dwell, was close at her feet, and the smell of the swamp things in it gave her the queer feeling she always had of the swamp's being very strange, a mysterious place, more adorable than any place she knew, and yet somehow to be feared a little.

That evening the sunset had been red, like the light of a great fire, all through the swamp, between the very black stems of the trees, and in the pools, and in the mists, that always hung and drifted there down the distances.

The little Marah had had a beautiful, dreadful, strange feeling that the whole world was under a spell.

The swamp was the centre of some vast enchantment, the very heart of it. The swamp

gave the enchantment out, and the enchantment of it widened out from it, as when one dropped a pebble in the pool, and circled in the whole of the world. She felt it the minute she picked the enchanted flower. The flower was a Venus slipper.

She could smell the wild, wet, pungent, acrid odour of it, now, as she thought of it, through all the sweetness of syringa. She knew it was an enchanted flower, because the minute she picked it, everything went strange. Everything passed under a spell. There was the same red light in the sky and in the swamp, in the tree stems and in the pools,—but everything had become more beautiful, and sadder.

In the swamp path she had kept close to Bridget Quinn, slipping cautiously past branches that reached out after her, and careful not to step among the roots of things that spread tangles for her feet.

And yet now, she wished — almost — she had let herself be taken in, be drawn close into, her swamp's enchantment. It was dreadful, but it was beautiful too,—the swamp, when one felt it

like that,— and strange and yet intimate, and to be held in awe, and yet to be held very especially dear.

She was homesick for the swamp, homesick for it, as she sat at supper in the warm candle light.

The candle light fell into her porringer, and caught at her shining spoon, as she lifted or lowered it, and at the glowing amber of the beads she wore about her neck, and at the bright, idle knitting needles, over there where Bridget's rocking chair squeaked among the shadows.

The left-over sense of the swamp's enchantment, the drowsiness of the garden fragrance, something most lonesome in the plaint of the whip-poor-will, overcame the little Marah, an emotion quite too great for her, and she cried out, "Biddy, Biddy Quinn!"

"What is it, my dearie dear?"

But Marah could not possibly have told.

"What is it that you want, my dearie dear?"

But Marah did not answer. She wanted something, dreadfully, but she did not know at all what it was. She sat there, with the spoon

in her hand, looking at Bridget Quinn. Bridget Quinn was a wonderful person. She could sing, in her broken old voice, mysterious, broken old songs, that were full of strange words, and that were the more wonderful to her and to Marah, for that they neither of them understood. And she could tell mysterious old stories, the stories of the ancient "Shanachies" perhaps, gathered in broken bits together of her country's dim past, stories of "the folk of the god whose name is Dana," of the Sidhe folk, and "the gentry"; of Niam, combing her wondrous hair; of the Red Branch Knights; of Cuchulainn and Conall Kernagh, of Laery the Victorious, Keelta of the Battles, Fergus mac Roy, and the three sons of Usna, of Finn mac Cumhal and the Fianna, Oscar, son of Oisín, and Dermot O'Dyna. She could tell of tricks the fairy had played, sure as sure, on her own people, in the cabin at home, how "thim small wee green ones," and the leprechauns, "wid the rid caps on thim," stole the sugar and the milk, and hid the soup ladle and the key of the door, and would tickle one's eyes

with a feather while one slept; and how a lady, dressed in mist, cured the mother when once she lay sick of a fever; and a little old man with long curly toes helped the father that time he was near sunk in the bog; and of how the little sister came on a lot of them playing the Timpan, one night of full moon it was. She could tell the grand stories of saints too, such human, sympathetic, intimately dear saints as Aunt Margaret wouldn't have at all approved of,—St. Patrick and St. Finnen, and St. Bridget of Kildare,—“an' all thim as was holy and shone like the stars;” how they tilled the land, and tended the cattle, and fashioned croziers and chalices and crosses and copied and illumined parchment pages, and washed the feet of the poor, and cooked their supper, and made their bed, and ploughed and digged and sowed and reaped, and fought from their Round Towers and their “Raths” against the Danes, and baptised their converts with water clear as crystal from their Holy Wells, and celebrated the Divine Mysteries with their little, iron, bronze-dipped, consecrated bells, and planted

round their rude little stone churches the splendid symbol of their sacred groves. Fairies and saints together, how friendly they came trooping to the nursery!

But to-night Bridget did not seem to understand. And for the first time there was a thing, that Marah couldn't possibly have told, between them. She sat looking at Bridget. Bridget went on not knitting and rocking and said, "Shall I be singing you the candle song, my dearie dear?" Poor Biddy! For all she was so wonderful, she thought that *that* would help. She hadn't the least idea that a little girl was grown past, way past, the candle song. That she hadn't the least idea of it, seemed to the little girl, that night somehow, a very sad and very lovable thing. She wouldn't for all the world have let the old woman know that the candle song no longer was wonderful to her. She wouldn't for all the world have let Bridget think that she had outgrown it;—and in a way, outgrown her, Bridget Quinn.

The old woman began to sing, her voice as

creaking as the voice of the rocking chair. The creak in it roused a perfect passion of sympathy in the heart of the little Marah. She wouldn't for the world have let Biddy know that now she was grown too wise to think the voice beautiful. When she had been very, very little, she had thought it beautiful. Now, of course, she knew it wasn't. But if it had been beautiful, she wouldn't have loved it half so much. She so much better loved all the things,—like the tadpoles,—that she was sorry for.

Biddy sang the candle song to the gleam of her idle knitting needles and the creak of her chair,—

*" Little Miss Etticoat,
In her white petticoat,
With her red nose;—
The longer she stands
The shorter she grows,—"*

Usually Marah beat time to the song, and to all Biddy's songs, with the spoon on the rim of her porringer. But to-night she did not.

She sat and stared at Miss Etticoat, who burned so bravely, burning down and down all

the time, growing shorter and shorter the longer she stood. Soon she would be only a lump of wax in the silver candle stick.

To-morrow night there would be another Miss Etticoat, just as tall and slim and white, with a flame just as red, and just as eager to catch at porringer and amber beads and knitting needles through the moonlight. But it would not be this same Miss Etticoat, never, never, never again. To little Marah, balancing her spoon full of bread and milk, came the horrible realisation that nothing would ever be the same again. Always the syringa would smell heavily sweet, and always the swamp would be an enchanted place, and always whip-poor-wills would call, lonesomely, and candle light be golden and warm upon silver cool moonlight, but it would never be just this syringa bloom, or just to-day's *feel* of the swamp, or just this special loneliness of the whip-poor-will's wailing, or this Miss Etticoat in this night's moonlight,—never, never any more.

Everything of it seemed to Marah almost beyond bearing. And yet in all the world there was no happier little girl than she.

II

THERE were so many things to be happy about.

One day Daphne took her blackberrying up in the hill pasture.

Perhaps it was funny to call one's mother by her little name like that, but it was very nice. Her mother often took her berrying, but that day was a special day, for no reason. Marah always loved to remember it.

It was a soft, still afternoon. A whole special set of happinesses belonged to it.

There was Daphne's saying at lunch, when they were just beginning the omelette, "Little girl, I've a plan."

The table was a lovely, dark, shiny, round pool, on which the little, frail dishes lay like water lilies, and the wine glasses were bubble things that held the light. To-day much of the light was shaded out, for it was very hot, by the drawing

of the green blinds. It filtered in through them, green, like the lights in the woods, and like the lights one sees reflected from wooded edges in water that is quite still.

Marah could hear the bees humming outside in the garden, and could smell the scent of box wood and petunias and roses.

There were nasturtiums on the table, in an old cut glass bowl, and the polished surface of the table reflected them in all their bronze and rust colours.

It reflected the ruby and the topaz of the wines too, in the old cut glass decanters.

All these things had to do with her happiness.

Daphne's hair was the colour of the darkest of the nasturtiums, and her eyes were brown like the pools in the swamp. She wore a white linen dress that day, just like the white stem of a little, frail, white birch tree, and she was so slim and straight, she made one think somehow of things of the woods. And her being beautiful had much to do with the happiness.

She smiled at Marah round the rust and bronze

of the nasturtiums, and said, "I have a most beautiful plan."

When she smiled at one like that, it was amusing to remember how one had heard Aunt Margaret say to people sometimes that she, Daphne, really was "a woman it was too dreadful to think of a child's having anything to do with."

Marah smiled back at her round the nasturtiums, and was happier even than usual.

She was so happy that she rubbed her curls against old James' elbow, when he passed her the corn bread. She knew she embarrassed him awfully, but she knew he loved her.

"We'll go berrying in the hill pasture," said Daphne, as if they'd never done it before; "now isn't that a wonderful idea?"

It was so *happy* about Daphne, that she could make everything seem wonderful. Just a thing one might do any day was rare, when one did it with her. And always and always, however often one did it, it was filled, just by doing it with her, with surprise.

They lingered through lunch, because it was

too hot to start out early, and that was especially delightful, though they lingered through lunch just like that, really, every day. Daphne had her coffee there at the table, and Marah moved round the table to sit close to her while she sipped it and smoked her cigarettes. By and bye, when the shadows of the lawn had grown almost as tall as the things they belonged to, Daphne got her long white gloves and her white parasol, and Marah fetched the berry basket and they started for the hill pasture.

There was a special happiness that had to do with the green dimness of the hall and the way the floor of it, that glistened like water, had to be danced over. There was the special happiness that belonged to the syringa bushes on the lawn; and to running, so fast one couldn't stop oneself, down where the lawn sloped to the brook.

"Marah, look at that little flock of yellow butterflies! Do you see how they've been keeping with us? And do you know why, Marah?"

"Oh, Daphne, why? Do they want us to dance with them?"



"It isn't so much that," said Daphne, "as that they want to show us the way somewhere. See, they are going down to the brook and the stone wall. They want us to go that way, instead of by the gate. We must wade the brook and climb the wall and break through the golden rod and the milk weed. I think it is the milk weed they want to take us to, Marah; you know how those little yellow butterflies love to cloud and drift over it. I think there's a clump of it by the white birches in the pasture corner that they want us to see."

The butterflies were all around her white skirts. She stooped to them, holding her white parasol with one hand over her shoulder, and fluttering her other hand in its white glove through the little soft flutter of yellow wings.

"You are so lovely," said Marah; "oh, Daphne, you are most lovely!"

"Marah, give me your hand. We'll show the butterflies how fast we can run;—faster than they can fly. Come,—come."

She had taken Marah's hand and she danced

with her backward a few steps from the flutter of yellow wings, and then turned, her parasol tilted, the little girl, laughing, clinging to her, and ran, light and swift as any butterfly, over the lawn.

The lawn dropped steep to the stone wall and the white birches, that were Daphne's own special trees, tall and slim and straight as she was.

Marah and Daphne climbed the wall, and stained their dresses with green from its moss, and ran down the bank to the brook below it. The brook was all gold and amber in sunshine and shadow, and it laughed as it ran, just as Daphne did.

"Off with your shoes," cried Daphne, letting go Marah's hand and dropping down on the bank in the ferns. She pulled off her gloves and got her shoes and stockings off quicker than Marah got hers off, and tossed them with her gloves and parasol across the brook, and holding her white skirts high, stepped down into the gold and amber water that leaped all shining about her foam white feet.

Brown-legged little Marah scrambled down the bank and into the brook, splashing and laughing, the basket on her arm, her shoes and stockings in her hand, her short skirts wet, her little feet brown and shining in the brown, shining brook. The water was cool and all curly and so alive.

"Oh, let's stay in it," said Marah, "let's be wading all the afternoon."

But Daphne, already across, said, "No, no, no, we've too much to do." She called back to Marah over her shoulder: "There's much we've got to do, you know, brooks and milk weed and blackberries. We can't do everything at once. And to-day it's blackberries. Give me your hand, Brownie,—there. Oh, how you've splashed me! Now to sit on the moss and dry our feet with maidenhair fern and put on our stockings and shoes."

The shadows of the little leaves played in and out of her bright hair. The milk weed stood up, tall and fragrant, and mauve flamed behind her, where she sat to put on her shoes and stockings.

"And nobody but me knows how lovely you are," said Marah; "I'm rather glad of it, Daphne, for it's having you all to myself, like my father's playing the violin for only just me. There, I'm ready first!"

"Not fair, your shoes have only two buttons," said Daphne. "Come along."

The hill path was all sweet with odours of milk weed and briar rose; tall golden rod waved its plumes; blue and purple asters starred the edge of the path.

The sumach was reddening in the fields, and there was a little of yellow and a little of scarlet showing already in the gauze-veiled woods. The hay stacks were piled in the fields, the buckwheat field was cut already and its sheaves were coral red. There was a golden wheat field. Something of the glow of autumn was already in the world, not its fire yet, only a first glow of it, that just suggested how soon all the days would flame away, scarlet and gold, down to the far opening distance. But now there was just a soft haze and gold glow there.

The hill pasture was alive with grasshoppers. Daphne and Marah laughed at them as they shook them from their skirts. The crickets shrilled in all the fields. There was a great congress of crows, and a dark flapping of them back and forth across the path. Daphne was afraid of them. It was really very queer about Daphne that she was always afraid of things, of the wind when it cried around the house and in the chimneys, and of the moonlight when it came into the rooms and made them seem all lonesome places, and of the sunset when it was a strange country of seas and mountains, all over the rim of the world.

Marah was afraid of things too, and so was Bridget, who found in all things signs and tokens, but they were afraid in a quite different way. Daphne's fear of things did not make things just the more delicious. She really did not enjoy being afraid of the crows. She wanted to turn back, when one of them, alone, flapped across the path from left to right.

"It means sorrow," she said, in a queer voice,

as if she did not at all mean to say it, looking back and shuddering.

But Marah only laughed, and after a minute she, Daphne, laughed too, and they went on. And Marah never knew whether or not there had been sorrow.

The blackberries grew in a wild, fragrant, red tangle, against the rail fence. There was a special happiness that had to do with rail fences, lichen-stained, all grey and crooked, the homes of chipmunks. And there was a special happiness that had to do with the smell of autumn fields and blackberries and milk weed and briar rose.

"Isn't it delicious?" said Marah. "I must tell father all about it, when I go to stay with him. I won't tell Aunt Margaret, but when he comes and takes me up to that funny room, I do get so lonely for you, Daphne, and for fields and blackberrying."

"You pick the berries," said Daphne, "and I will tell you 'things' while you pick them, if you like."

They always called the sort of stories Daphne

told just that, "things," because they were not stories really at all.

Daphne threw herself down, all her long slim length, on the grass, and tipped her parasol over her eyes and clasped her hands under her head. Some of the "things" began with,— "Once upon a time she followed him, beyond the night, across the day,—" and then changed. Those stories that were not stories, always, without Marah's ever knowing how, with just a vanishing away, as it were, "over the uttermost purple rim," came, somehow, to be all "things" of just a forest where someone was alone. The forest came up close to the three windows of a room where there was a red brick tiled floor and a blue porcelain stove, and where the someone lived who was alone. The forest, it seemed, was different from the woods here at home just in the way the word forest was different from the word woods, deeper and darker, and stranger and more intense. From the Carrefour du Grand Bassin, Daphne said, four roads led away, the ways of the four winds. One way was the Allée

Noire, and one was the way of dawn, and one was the way of sunset, and the fourth led to the edge, the "uttermost purple rim." On the road to the edge was the house of the room of the blue porcelain stove.

"Marah," said Daphne, under her parasol, there among the blackberry bushes against the rail fence, "do you know, Marah, there are strange great flights of crows that pass over the forest in the autumn. Sometimes, for days and days they will be passing, and the sky will be all streaked black with their flight, and their cawing will be a part in the voice of the forest."

"With the music of harp and organ?" asked Marah, who had chosen her place to pick quite close to Daphne, and was dropping the berries, the red ones and the green ones too, into the basket as she listened, half attending, happy in that nothing of her small life mattered much to her, but Daphne's just being there, and the sunshine and the rail fence, and the blackberries. "They would be a part of the cathedral music, the way my dear frogs are part of moonlight and syringa

smell, and the way in the city the cable car noise is part of its getting dark, and of my father's playing the violin?"

Daphne had told her often how the forest, where someone wandered alone, was like a vast cathedral, of grey pillars and ribbed, groined vaulting, and grand arches, through which the sun slanted, stained as through old cathedral windows, and through which the winds made music of harp and voice and organ. She knew just how the forest sometimes was strung to the winds like a harp, and how sometimes the winds sounded through it as through the pipes of a great organ, and how the winds sang in it. And Daphne had told her how always one worshipped in it, even when one did not know what it was one worshipped,—and she, Marah, understood, for it would be there just as it was in the woods here when Bridget said, "Hist, darlint, there's that with us as we cannot be knowing."

"I suppose it's like that,—there being music,—in all woods and forests," said Marah, picking blackberries.

"Yes," said Daphne, "it's like that in all places of the world when one stops really to listen." And she told how in the night the someone in the room of the blue porcelain stove lay often awake all the hours through, listening to the forest close at the windows, and even sleeping was conscious of it, dreaming all dreams to the dark, dark sound of it. And she told how when there went those great flights of crows across the forest in the autumn the shadow of their black passing stained the forest as it did the sky, and the sound of their cawing was very dark in the forest, and how it was then that the someone who was alone was least lonely, because it was then that the forest was loneliest.

Her voice went dark somehow, as she said that, and Marah had a queer feeling of there being a thing near that she did not at all understand. She had an odd feeling for a minute as if somehow the black shadow of the crows, passing over the far away forest, were fallen here on the rail fence and the blackberry bushes.

But Daphne cried, "Oh, see that chipmunk!

How he sits up with his little hands on his white pinafore! His mother doesn't have to say 'Sit up straight' to him every minute, Marah; and see how clean his pinafore is kept!"

Sitting up straight and pinafores reminded one too much of Aunt Margaret, so Marah changed the subject hastily.


"Tell me more 'things' of the forest, Daphne."

And Daphne went on. Where went the Allée Noire, Daphne said, there were all pine trees. The tall dark pines stood straight up like the masts of ships,—that were, indeed, their brothers,—slender and pliant, rough and brown of stem and branch and twig, their dark green, furred boughs tapering up, festooned, each twig pointing up, towards the sky. Underneath, the rough brown floor of the forest was the entire possession of the pine trees. They let no green thing live there, no undergrowth of fern or vine, and where their depth of brown needles was broken through by rock, it was brown rock, that knew no moss, only a little of grey lichen, such as that on the tree stems. There was a

rough little, narrow, brown path, that climbed up and down, over pine roots and pine needles, and that someone often followed alone,—alone with the wind. Even when there was no wind elsewhere in the forest, and perhaps no wind really there among them, there was the sound of wind always in the pine trees.

“How do you know, Daphne? Did some one tell you?”

Daphne said that the *soughing* of the winds through the pines there, was as quite a different music from the music elsewhere in the forest. It was the music of the sea. The winds swept through the pines, surged through them, with the sound of great seas gathering. The billows of the winds rose mightily, and fell mightily, and their great swells broke among the pines, broke and surged back again, sounding and resounding, and then died away. And then there was a lull. And then the next great wave of the winds gathered upon the pines, and swept through them, and broke upon them, and passed over. She said that that was why the some one who was alone in the



forest most especially loved to be among the pines.

“Because he loved the sea, Daphne?”

“Because,” said Daphne, “it was over the sea he would have gone, if he could;—if only he could.”

“Why couldn’t he?” asked Marah.

Daphne told how the winds brought all the numberless sounds of the sea to the forest. There was the sound as of surf on wide shores. And there was the sound of waves along the ship’s side. And the winds in the tree tops were as the winds in the rigging of ships.

It was as if the winds that came to the pines came to bring them word of the sea, that they knew far away, to bring to the pine trees word of their brothers, the masts, who sailed the seas, and to whose sails and cording they, the traveling winds, would carry back the messages of the forest. The pines who had been taken away to be masts of ships, and who stood up tall above far waters, swayed to the same wind that rocked these their brothers. And so, from forest to sea

and from sea to forest, the wind bore messages.

"Marah, I want to tell you another 'thing.'" Daphne sat up, her parasol tossed back, and drew up her knees and clasped her arms around them. "Marah, listen, and I will tell you something."

"Now just you wait," said Marah, "I'm most done picking. Wait a minute and I'll come and sit down, and then I can listen better."

The basket was nearly full. Daphne sat still, looking at nothing, out of her big brown eyes. After a while little Marah came and sat down beside her in the close cropped pasture grass.

"Now go along wid ye," she said, like Bridget Quinn, "it's waiting to hear you I am."

This was a "thing" like none that Daphne had ever told her before. Daphne sat there hugging her knees and looking straight ahead of her at nothing whatever and told her it. It was this:

Once when Christ passed through the streets of a city, healing the sick, there was a woman of sad wounds who sought, not to come near him, in the press of the crowd, but to escape from him, out of the crowd, that had overtaken her, upon

whatever way hers had been. It was that she would flee from the saving of his touch. He called to her,—Would she not come and be healed? She answered him, standing still and looking at him, but for the instant only. She answered him that she would keep her wounds, cherishing their pain, because they were all she had left her of the man she had loved, because of whom she had been stoned. . . .

Daphne's voice fell queerly away at the end of it, into the soft stillness of the afternoon and of the pasture.

Marah nibbled the white end of a long wand of timothy grass. There was something she would rather have liked to say, but nothing she knew how to say seemed to belong in Daphne's silence.

The shadow of the fence and of the bushes was grown so long that it almost touched them where they sat in the grass. And the sunlight was very golden,—one could have taken it up in one's hands and held it so, a soft, warm, smooth, beautiful thing to hold. And all the smells of things

grew intenser, heavier and more sweet. The voices of the night creatures had joined the voices of birds and bees and crickets.

The great soft stillness thrilled with voices, and was made by them none the less silent. Frogs and tree toads and newts were part of it, no less beautifully than the whip-poor-will.

The gold light was turned to crimson.

And down below the hill, where the brook ran in the hollow, there was a mist rising, creeping up the hillside, all white.

The great round glowing disc of the sun sank lower and lower to the deepening purple of the opposite hills, and balanced, a whole long instant, on the rim of them, and then slipped down behind them, and the purple shadows of them fell across all the world. The shadows deepened and deepened, and the loveliness of it, and the loneliness, and the great peace, and the great longing deepened.

Marah did not at all know what it was that deepened upon her as she sat there with the basket of blackberries. She did not know at all

what it was that *everything made her want*, dreadfully.

"My little girl," said Daphne, "it's most dark!"

She sat up in the grass and rubbed her eyes. "Home and bread and milk and the dream man," she said; "pull me up, Marah, you big little girl!"

Marah took her two hands, and she sprang up, all light and quick, and they went down through the pasture and the buckwheat fields, keeping the hill path. As they went down the path, in the soft, vibrant twilight, Marah had an odd notion, somehow, that Daphne would like to have her hold her hand. She had an odd, little, vague idea that Daphne was feeling something very much, and that she, Marah, was feeling it with her. Marah never was quite to know what it was they felt, she and her Daphne, her mother, whom Aunt Margaret said one shouldn't have anything to do with. She held Daphne's hand very fast as they went down the hill path, and Daphne held her hand very fast.

III

"ONCE upon a time, as the Happy Princess went with him," Daphne said, "on that beautiful way of theirs, 'beyond the night, across the day,'—you know, Marah,—they found the gold key."

"Over the uttermost purple rim?" asked Marah.

"Yes," said Daphne.

"What was it the key of, Daphne?"

Daphne sat in the big bay-window of the library, and the sunset was all behind her bright hair. Marah and Bridget Quinn had just come in from the woods and Marah had been having a beautiful time. The woods had been most lovely in the gauze lights of September. They had been way to Green Pond, that was not green at all, but quite of gold. They had eaten their lunch on the edge of the pond, under a quite gold beech tree. Bridget had spread out a corner of her green shawl for Marah to sit on and Marah

had not sat on it, the moss and the fallen gold beech leaves were so nice. Bridget had taken the stockings to darn, and had not darned them. It had been such a lovely day in the world. Daphne had not been out at all, all day. She sat against the light of the sunset, with all the light of it in her hair, and her delicate, lovely face quite shone out of the glow. She was smoking her funny little cigarettes. Her hand that held the cigarette was so fragile that it seemed to be transparent, made of shadow, blue like the cigarette smoke, and there were blue, smoky blue, shadows about her big eyes. Marah watched the little blue shadow clouds of her cigarette smoke floating against the sunset.

"Did they know what the gold key was the key of?" she asked, sitting on the rug at Daphne's feet and looking up at her.

"They came to know by and by," said Daphne, "when he was gone, and she could not follow, and they had a great, great need of knowing."

Then she went on to tell of the forest.

It was a "thing" that Marah especially liked,

about the forest. It was so real and like her own woods.

The four wide, long, straight roads that came through the forest from the ways of the four winds, met at the basin of the gold key. The open space about the basin was square, as the forest walled it in on all four sides, and the basin was square, rimmed with rough grey stone. Daphne said that this was a "thing" that someone dreamed.

"Someone who was alone in the forest, Daphne?"

"Someone who was far away from the forest."

"Did they both, all two of them, know about it, Daphne?"

"Oh, yes."

"Daphne, did ever you tell this 'thing' to anybody but me?"

"Yes," said Daphne, "some of it, and some of it was told to me."

"It's two people's 'thing' together?"

"Yes," said Daphne.

She said it was a "thing" that was quite true

and yet that was a dream. At each corner of the square stone rim of the basin there stood a yew tree, all four of them alike, exactly, very dark, cut each in the shape of a pyramid. The other trees were all such as one finds in any French forest, oak and chestnut and beech. And there was just one single white birch tree, which was strange in the forest.

"That is your own tree," said Marah.

The white birch tree really and truly was there, Daphne said, but it was only in the dream of it that there were the yew trees. She told Marah how the forest floor, away through all the woods, was clear of undergrowth, open quite away, between the great boles of the trees, and laid years deep in fallen leaves. The four roads were all grass-grown and mossy, and where they met at the Carrefour du Grand Bassin, squaring in the basin, that specially deep green moss, which is like an infinite, infinitesimal forest of pine trees, carpeted them. It was the very sort of moss, Daphne said, that one, if one were Marah, would make believe to be a real forest, and people with

fairies a tenth centimetre high, to match the centimetre high pine trees. And it gave one in the dream the very same pleasure it would have given Marah, to kneel down and sink one's hands in the moss, the same delightful sense of everything's being possible. That,—the sense of everything's being possible,—was with one especially in the dream wherein one came to the basin of the four roads. One never knew by which road it was that one came to the basin, or by which one went away from it, when one had to go. Three of the roads led away, as one looked along them, one after another — to the west, where dwelt the sunsets; and to the east, where waited the crepuscule; and to the north, where the storms came from; and to the south, where was the most gold sunshine. The north road was called the Allée Noire. It was very dark, the trees so overarched it, and it darkened and darkened down all its distance. It went to the pine trees to which the sea sang. The south way led to the house of the room of the blue porcelain stove, and beyond that it went on, it might be, to the edge of the world,

leading over the "uttermost purple rim"; — the one who lived in the house of the blue porcelain stove did not know, and never went to see.

"Why not?" asked Marah.

Daphne said it would be sad to go alone by the road to the edge.

Marah nodded. She felt strangely about the road to the edge.

Daphne said that it seemed to be always autumn when one came in the dream to the Grand Bassin, and the forest was always all of copper and bronze and gold. There was just enough wind, always, to whisper in the trees, and always there was a painted leaf or two drifting down to lie in the still water of the basin. All the detail of the dream was intimate, close and very real. There was a clump of gorgeous yellow fungus, against the stem of the white birch tree across the basin, and there was an intricate embroidery, fine as frost work, all of grey and green and yellow lichen, on the stone rim of the basin. One found acorn cups lying in the moss, and an empty snail shell, and a crow's black feather. Sometimes

the acorn cups were full of rain. And then they were like little round brown basins, sunk in the carrefours of the little fine forest of the moss. But one could not pick them up as one would have done if one had been a child and the dream had been real. Sometimes one heard the drum of a partridge in the woods, and sometimes a magpie,—that one must bow to seven times to save bad luck,—would start up from the rusty depths of the woods. Or one would hear a blackbird whistle or hear the scurry of a rabbit's feet where the leaves were dry, and have glimpse of his little white tail vanishing. And sometimes one would sight a deer, off down one of the four roads, see him stand there for a long minute, antlers lifted, his quick, light body as brown as the woods behind him. And there was a wolf, a big, gaunt, red wolf, that came sometimes. He came and stood by the white birch tree. One knew a strange thing about him. It was that, however strong the sunlight, or the moonlight, the wolf cast no shadow, and that, even if there had been snow on the road his great pads would have made

no track upon it. The water in the basin was the colour of amber and the leaves floating on it were of gold, and there was a gold key down in the bottom of the basin. One saw it through the clear amber water. The water in the basin was very deep, as water in such a basin would not be except in a dream, but, deep as it was, one saw the gold key glinting through it, from deep, deep down in the bottom of it.

"Was it their key, of the two of them, Daphne, that they had found together?"

"Yes," said Daphne.

"And why hadn't they kept it?"

"They had kept it. It was there in the basin for them both."

"Was it for nobody but just for them?"

"For nobody but just for them."

"Nobody else could see it?"

"Nobody else."

"Or even know of it?"

"Or even know of it."

Daphne said that always the last thing in the dream one knelt at the rim of the basin and

leaned over and looked to see the gold gleam of the key where it lay deep down in the water. She said that the key was the key of grief, of the melancholy that was in all woods and all forests at all times, and that was so dear a sympathy to people who had grief. She said that the key was the key of mystery, of the mystery that was in all woods and all forests at all times, and most when autumn gave them of its melancholy. She said that it was the key of joy, of just a child's delight in "making believe" about moss forests, and people a tenth centimetre high, and black crow's feathers, and acorn cups full of rain. She said one called the key "The Key of Dreams."

IV

THE attic was a big, low raftered shadowy place, that smelt of cedar wood and dust, and of the red and white matting that covered part of the floor, and of the wasps,—that somehow had an odour of honey,—where they hummed all about the dusty, cobwebby window panes, in hot summer afternoons. The low windows were covered with cobwebs. The cobwebs actually veiled the sunshine, where it tried to come through, and the farther spaces of the attic, especially where the roof slanted down to the floor under the gables, were always more or less in shadow. Mice played there in the shadow. One could hear them scampering, and see them, themselves, little grey shadows. Always in the autumn there was a pile of apples in one corner of the attic, and the smell of them was all through the attic. They were winter apples, put there to be kept for cooking by and by. Meanwhile the wasps ate them. The

wasps had slim little waists and black stripes on their yellow velvety dresses. Marah never dared to go and get an apple for fear the wasps mightn't like it. And yet she was very fond of the wasps, almost fonder of them than she was of the mice. She went always alone to the attic. Neither Daphne nor Bridget seemed to care for it as she did. And the mice and the wasps were part of the feel of it, just as the frogs and the whip-poor-will and the smell of syringa were part of the feel of supper in the nursery, and the Venus slipper and red lights were part of the feel of the swamp.

There were all sorts of most mysterious dusty things in the attic. There was a big dresser of dark, shiny wood. Its drawers had glass knobs, that shone through the dusk of the corner where it stood, and that might really have been made all of diamonds. In the drawers there were old laces, yellow as honey, and frail as cobwebs. And there were old brocades that broke like little cracking, dry leaves when one touched them, and that had all sorts of lovely faded leaf colours in them. There was a tall mirror in the corner by

the dresser. It swung in a frame of dark wood like the dresser, and it was so old a mirror that it was grown all dim and green with age, and even when the light was full upon it one saw things in it as if floating in dim green water. Marah was always a little afraid of the mirror. It seemed to her that if she went really close to it, and looked really deep into it, she would see things that were not there at all, some room quite other than the attic, and that would be very strange. She was always wanting to go quite near like that, and look, but she never dared. She used to wonder about it,—if the room she would have seen there in the mirror were a room that once she had been in, perhaps long ago when she was very little, and had forgotten, or if it were a room she had never yet seen, but into which, by and by, when she was grown up, she would have to go some day. However that was, she was afraid of the mirror, and never could make herself go near enough to see.

It was in the attic that most she missed her father. That of course was because of the lum-

ber room in the city house. The lumber room was not nice at all, not at all like the attic, but it was there that Marah and her father had their only real times, when he took her away from everything, up there, and seemed to be not at all the father of downstairs, and played the violin to her alone. Downstairs he was a very fine person indeed, very grand and clever and proud, who did everything just as it ought to be done, and quite belonged with Aunt Margaret and the drawing-rooms and things like that. But upstairs in the funny place he and Marah sometimes escaped to, he was so different that nobody but Marah would have believed he was the same person ever at all. When he put on the shabby, old velvet coat that hung behind the door, and knotted the black scarf from the pocket of it, round his throat, instead of the so terribly proper collar, and rumpled his hair up, and tucked his violin under his chin, his long, narrow eyes shut, his long thin hands caressing the violin,—then little Marah was lonely for the attic at home. And when to the attic at home there came those purple and

gold autumn sunsets, that made her think always of violin music, she was lonely for her father, for that different father, the lumber room father. And all of it, sunset and violin, and smell of apples and of the matting, and buzzing of wasps, and loneliness, were mixed in a queer feeling that she could not have told of even to Daphne. Sometimes in the city when she had done something that Aunt Margaret thought she ought to be sorry for, and when Aunt Margaret would tell her to "sit in that chair until she could be good again," she could manage to make herself sorry just by saying to herself, over and over, all alone, with her eyes shut, "Purple and gold, purple and gold." The words meant to her things so beautiful,— she couldn't possibly have told what things, — and were themselves so beautiful,— she did not in the least know why,— that just the beauty made her want something, made her want something awfully, though she did not in the least know what it was she wanted; and Aunt Margaret, coming after a while and finding her tearful, used to think that it was only to be good.

Mid-seas, cloud-shadowed to purple, sunlit to gold; cathedral windows, purple lighted, seen through dusk of purple incense, above golden stars of altar candles; November sunsets, glowing, golden, beyond dim purple woodways; still June twilights, sweet with the purple fragrance of lilacs, and with gold stars hanging in the purple dusk over fields where June lambs bleated; purple sobbing of a violin in shadow, somewhere; purple of velvet that was ermine bordered; gold of kings' crowns and of angels' harps; golden flash of a trumpet,—it was very happy and very sad, to be a naughty little girl with sense of such things. And then at home, when the dusk gathered in the attic, the late summer dusk that was so thick and purple and soft and heavy, and the sunset was gold outside the wasps' cobwebby windows, all the sense of gold and purple, all that queer sense of wanting something, would make so great a loneliness in the heart of little Marah, that not even to Daphne could she have told it. Least of all the world to Daphne could she have told it. For Daphne would have understood.

And it happened Marah, even when she was a little girl, to know that often in one's worst times it is to just the people who understand that — because they would so understand — one may not turn. It was a most sad knowledge. Marah, in the purple and gold and dust and cobwebs, sometimes came rather near to being a sad little girl. But that sad hour had its joy too, for when the purple and gold was saddest at the windows, the wasps there went to sleep, packed all together in the corners of the window panes, and then it was one had one's chance, for sure as sure, of getting jolly well the better of them. Then it was that, through the twilight, all noiselessly, not rousing them, on tiptoe, watching them over one's shoulder, one might steal across to the unguarded horde of apples, and silently, careful not to wake them, fill one's pinafore with the very reddest and roundest, and escape without their ever knowing, — unless they went and counted over in the morning.

V

THERE WAS AN odd thing that happened to Marah, and that she never forgot. It happened when she was quite little, soon after she and Daphne came to live in the lovely old white house, that had a porch of tall, white columns, and a fanlight over the door. She remembered nothing whatever of the time before they came to live there. This was the first thing of all her life that she vividly remembered, and she did not know why. She often thought of it in autumn.

It had happened in the autumn. She knew that it must have been autumn because of the acorns and partridge berries she remembered they had been gathering, she and Bridget Quinn, out in the woods, to make a present for Daphne. It had been quite her own idea to make a present for Daphne.

Daphne had been away for days and days, all of a week, and was to come back to-morrow. She

had gone away in a great hurry without even seeing Marah to say good-bye. There had been a telegram, Marah heard the housemaid tell Bridget, when they came in from nutting in the woods that day to find that Daphne was gone.

"There was bad news in it for sure," said the housemaid, "that's plain, but who was it from, and where did she go?"

"What is that to you?" said Bridget Quinn. "Mind you start no talk below stairs."

Within all Marah's memory there had never come a telegram to the Grange before. She had asked Bridget about it. "Was it from my father, do you think?"

But Bridget had said, "It was never from him, darlint."

It had been Marah's own idea to make a whole little, beautiful, tiny garden of autumn, all arranged with paths and a fountain and a pergola, in the cover of a wooden box, to stand on Daphne's table for a surprise for her when she came home.

The shallow wooden box James had found for it held the little garden as in a low wall. Marah

had trained tiny shreds of vine over the little wall, and over the little pergola of twigs, and banked in all sorts of mosses, the deep green moss that is like a forest of tiny pine trees, and the moss that is like tiny ferns, and the moss that has little grey green cups, and the smooth velvet moss that one finds in dry sunny places, and the more vividly green, aromatic mosses of the swamp.

She had made little paths through the mosses and had planted little garden beds full of winter-green berries and princess pine and Indian pipes. She had made a fountain with the silver top of her powder box, with tiny pebbles in the bottom and acorn cups around the edge to hide all but just gleams, of the silver, and with real water in it. She had been all day working on her garden.

It was quite late at night when Daphne came home, but Bridget Quinn had let Marah wait up for her. She remembered it all very well.

It was a cold night and there was a high wind. It had been blowing all day, out of the north. The wind had driven the fallen leaves in mad

whirling dances before it, and beaten down the few leaves that had been left till then on the trees, and the trees were as bare as if it were winter. The wind swayed and lashed the bare trees and made all day a strange harp music on the cords of their branches. The slim little poplars of the drive it had bent almost quite over, and at the very top of each of them it had left just a flame-shaped cluster of yellow leaves. It made Marah think, as she looked out at them, tossing against the sunset, of a row of mad Miss Etticoats, so tall and thin and pale their stems were, their yellow flickers of flame alight before candle time.

Marah had dearly loved the way the wind cried round the house, that it made so sheltering and intimate. Daphne's room was specially delightful, as full as it could hold of firelight. It had white walls, upon which the firelight was very beautiful, and it had a long mirror like a door in the wall, that gave back the white room again, just a little mysteriously, somehow, as if the mirror room were a memory of the real room, or a dream of it,

in the way it would be if one were gone away far from it and were remembering it.

Marah herself arranged Daphne's present on a small table in front of the mirror, where the mirror reflected it, and made two of it, in the firelight. It was indeed a beautiful present. She was very happy about it while she waited downstairs for Daphne.

There was a wide hall that went straight across the house, from north door and drive and lawn through to south door and veranda and garden. The stairs came straight down into the hall. The hall had dark panelled walls, and a dark, polished floor, and there was a big fireplace at one side of it. While Marah waited for her mother, she danced on the polished floor in and out of the firelight, and the dogs raced after her, the two collies and Mikey, the Irish terrier, and the yellow dog the coachman had given her. Bridget Quinn sat on the bench by the south door with her green shawl around her shoulders, because the hall was a draughty place. When Bridget Quinn huddled herself up in her shawl,

she looked like the witch in one's fairy tales, a face all wizened and with sloes stuck in for eyes. "Granny, Granny broomstick," sang Marah, dancing up to her, "Granny, Granny black cat—"

It was just then, Marah remembered, they had heard the carriage. She flew to open the door and got there before either Bridget or James, and let Daphne in, out of the windy night.

Daphne came in, a Daphne Marah had never seen before. She was all still and white. She did not seem to see Marah at all. James shut the door behind her, and she stood in the bright hall, not seeming to see any of it.

"Daphne, Daphne, it's me, aren't you glad to see me? Aren't you glad to come home, Daphne?"

Daphne stood looking down at her blindly, and did not speak to her. She had on a long heavy cloak and when Bridget came to take it from her she let her take it, not speaking to her any more than she had spoken to Marah.

Her face was dreadful to see — Marah caught

at her hands, but her hands were cold and without life and dreadful to touch.

"Daphne, it's me, me, oh, don't you care at all that it's me?"

"Hush now!" said Bridget Quinn to Marah, "hush now, my lamb, it's tired she is. Run along to James for a minute and leave her just to Quinny"; and she said to Daphne, as if she were speaking to a child, "come right along of Quinny, darlint, now there's my dear."

"Daphne," still implored Marah.

"Hist a bit, lambie," said the old woman and put her arms around the strange Daphne, and got her to the stairs, and climbed the stairs with her, helping her, saying, "There, dearie, there, there!"

Marah was left standing in the hall. James had gone away. The empty hall shone in the fire-light and sounded with the wind. Just a few minutes ago Marah had danced there and been happy. She did not know what had happened and what in all the world to do.

James came into the hall,—“Oh, there you

are, Miss! Beg pardon, Miss, but I am wanting you, please, Miss. Would you make so kind as to come with me to the pantry, and we'll arrange a little tray of port wine and biscuits, with a bit of a flower on it, I should say, if I might make so bold, Miss, for you to take up your own self, by and by, to Madam."

"James, do you think Daphne does not love me any more? What do you think can have happened? Do you think that someone has gone away? Do you think that Daphne can have been saying good-bye to someone she loves, James, and who has had to go away?" All Marah herself knew of sorrow was the sorrow of saying good-bye as she had to say it twice each year, to her father and to Daphne. "James, do you think it can be that she has had to say good-bye to someone?" she asked.

"Where ever did you get such a notion as that, Miss? Now I'll be cutting the bread very thin and you be buttering it, if you please, Miss. And which would Madam like best, the plate with the little small flowers on it, or the blue and gold

plate? Did ever you notice the little red ants that live along with me here in the pantry, Miss, how busy they are working at their affairs of their own, and what a fancy they've got for the sugar?"

"Marah, my lamb," said Bridget Quinn, at the pantry door, "I thought as it would be here I'd find you. Run along to your mother, darlint, she's wantin' of you. I'll fetch up the tray."

Daphne stood by the little table, before the mirror, that had Marah's gift to her set upon it. She stood against the mirror. And it seemed as if the mirror were a door behind her into some unreal and intimate and enchanted room. She was as strange a Daphne as if she'd come from the strange Mirror Room. Yet what she said was not strange at all.

"Little girl, did you make all this beautiful garden thing for me? Oh, my own little girl!"

She came to Marah with swift steps, and threw her arms around her, and dropped on her knees holding her, and, kneeling by her, said over and over, "My little girl, my little girl!"

Her face upturned to Marah's, as she knelt and as the little girl stood there, was all marked with the touch of things the little girl did not understand, or try to understand. Her eyes, dark as the water of deep pools, held reflection of things Marah had no knowledge or understanding of.

"My little girl," she said, and again, "my little girl—" and then, "Why, baby, you're crying! And it is I who made you! Oh, my little girl!"

She slipped down from her knees, and sat on the floor, and pulled Marah down into her lap, holding her fast, and rocked her back and forth, as if she really had been a baby. "My little girl, my little girl!" she kept saying, and that was all she ever said of the strange thing that had been.

Marah sobbed, "I love you. I love you better than ever. I never loved you as I do this minute!"

And Daphne said, kissing her wet eyes, "I love you, I love you, better than ever."

Then came Bridget Quinn with the tray of

wine and bread and butter, and Daphne would have the tray set on the floor and they pick-nicked there; and Marah must sleep with her that night; and they must have the table with the little garden on it drawn up close beside the bed.

And always of that night Marah was to keep an exquisite memory. Through whatever she had of sleep and dreams there was with her, all night long, consciousness of the little, tiny, wild, woody odours of her garden, and of Daphne's hand, that never lost touch of her hand.

VI

THE little girl and the old Irish woman were going home at dusk together through the autumn woods.

"Home," at the still far off end of the woods road, would be the big, square, white house, with the portico and the fanlight over the door, that the little girl's several times great-grandfather had built when the old country gave him his lands.

The windows of the house, lamplit and firelit, would throw their welcome far out into the woods and the night to meet the little girl and the old woman and the yellow dog who were coming home. And to greet all those also who might come this night, for it was All Hallow E'en, and there might come strange guests.

As the little girl thought of the night it was, she huddled closer to Bridget's skirts and put out a hand groping under the folds of the old woman's green shawl for the touch of an answering hand.

"They will not come till it is quite dark, will they, Bridget Quinn?"

"No, my dearie dear, poor things, they cannot come till it is quite dark."

The old woman had a softness of the brogue left yet, and a special quality in her voice that made it somehow lighten and darken. It darkened now, "drew night," as her people say. "It will be dark when we come to the brook, dearie dear. And they will be waiting there for us."

"You are sure they will not harm us, Bridget Quinn?"

"They harm us? The poor ones! They will be but grateful that we take thought of them, those poor lone ones as cannot help themselves."

"They will be tired, won't they, Bridget Quinn? They have come so far?"

"And it's far back they must go in the dawn again, dearie dear."

"They will be tired and wet and cold. And we will keep fires burning for them all night, won't we? And put the chairs all close, and have

all the candles lighted. Would they not eat with us, don't you think, Bridget Quinn?"

"Perhaps they would," said the old woman.

Surely never had little girl a stranger companion than Bridget Quinn, the old Irish woman in the green shawl. What was there not left over, from far past ages and the world's old moods, of mystery and nearness to wonders, always abiding in the folds of the green shawl. To-night the little girl was afraid and held the hand under the green shawl very fast as they went, and talked anxiously.

Coming home through the woods with Bridget Quinn of a late autumn evening, was always very strange. The world must be full of people who know what late autumn means in the woods, and what the coming on of dark means then. All woods are haunted then. For Marah the woods were haunted at all times, she always felt the presence of strange things in them, in their deep solitudes, where one was never lonely, and their silences that were so sympathetic, so caressing. But towards Hallowe'en, she felt things of the

ing by the brook, and yet being glad they'd be there, and wanting to care for them; of the smell of the hazel fringes, and the sounds of live things, the whirl of unseen wings, the patter of unseen little feet, a squirrel's startled chatter, a bird note, making all the more still the autumn night stillness; and of all these things together as being part of a wonderful thing that she was to keep the love of with her all her life. When they came to the turn by the birches it was quite dark, and the birches were white ghosts, waiting there. The road dipped, past the birches, deep down to the hollow and the brook.

The little girl clutched her nurse's hand very tight. The hollow by the brook was full of mist. The sound of running water came up out of the mist. Marah held her breath as she and the old woman came to where there were those who waited in the mist. She had a queer notion, and kept it always afterwards, that, when Bridget Quinn spoke, all the woods and all her own little life, had been hushed in waiting for the thing the old woman was to say. On the bridge in the middle

of it, over the soft rush of the brook, Bridget Quinn stopped and took her by the shoulders, holding her fast, and bent down over her, and said to her in a whisper,

“Darlint, repeat what I say after me.”

Marah met her strange old eyes in the strange twilight, and said what Bridget said, wondering, fearfully, after the strange old voice, in the wood’s strange silence,—

“Thim as is dead, God remember their souls,—say it, darlint!”

“Thim as is dead, God remember their souls.”

“And God take mercy on thim.”

“And God take mercy on thim.”

“And not alone thim as is dead, but thim as has sinned.”

“But, Biddy, they are the bad people. What would Aunt Margaret say if she knew we prayed for them?”

“Say it,” said Biddy, “niver mind the likes of her. Say it, darlint, say, God have mercy on thim.”

“God have mercy on thim.”

"Not alone thim as is dead, but thim as has sinned."

"Thim as has sinned," echoed Marah, in the dusk on the bridge over the brook.

"Forgive the evil of thim."

"Forgive the evil of thim."

"And take thim in thy time, oh God, into thy peace."

"And take thim in thy time, oh God, into thy peace.—Biddy, I'm afraid."

"Darlint, my heart's own, there's no fear for you."

"Biddy, I want to go home!"

"It's home we go, darlint!"

Up the hill then they went, with the strange sense of Hallowe'en over them, and out from the woods into the fields, and from the fields to the garden and the lawn and the lights of the house, where Daphne and bread and milk would be waiting.

VII

DAPHNE said that there was a high white wall,— it shone very white in the sunset,— that the road had followed for a long distance before one came to the gate, and that the road followed on again beyond the gate, as far as one could see.

“What road was it, Daphne?”

“The Road to the Edge,” said Daphne.

“It went out of the forest then?”

“It went across wide fields, that were all painted in with great sweeps of the brush; all the field colours, don’t you know, Marah, and all the colours coming to be purple, somehow, toward the edge.”

“‘The uttermost purple rim?’” asked Marah, “then this is one of the times when they two were together?”

“No,” said Daphne, “it was when she could no more follow him, except in dreams.”

“Why could she no more follow him, Daphne?”

Daphne did not answer that, and Marah did not

ask any more questions. There was something in the way Daphne told this "thing" that kept her from interrupting again.

Daphne said that on the other side of the road poplar trees stood in a tall straight line, and beyond them the autumn fields, reaped and sheaved, lay away quite to the golden sky. Over the top of the wall there reached trees, whose branches were coloured by autumn with amber and topaz and bronze and gold, as were the fields. The wall was on the left of the road, as one went in the direction one was to take. One must have been going toward the south, for the sunset was on one's right as one went; the straight, tall, slim stems of the poplars stood like black bars against it, and their shadows lay straight across the road and touched the white wall.

The gate was high, and its bars were filled in between in such manner that one could not see through it at all. Perhaps the gate was made of iron, but it was so covered with moss and lichen and ivy that it might,—especially so, with the light of the sunset upon it,—have been of

jade. Perhaps it had been locked for a long time, but it opened at a touch, and one went in by it, and it closed again. The avenue led straight away from the gate, a royal road, all sealed with gold seals of fallen leaves, to the pool, and the house on the edge. The pool lay in perfect stillness, green like jade. Seven white swans floated motionless upon it and their reflections floated with them. The white glimmering house stood on the very edge of it, and was reflected perfectly in it. The eastern sky behind the house was of jade green,—like the pool,—and the house, with its old mansardes and chimneys, shone out white, as if it were cut out of alabaster, against the jade green of the sky and in the jade green of the pool. Nothing ever had been so still.

As one went on, Daphne said, by the gold sealed road, the stillness deepened. It was very strange. The seven swans on the jade pool might have been seven white lilies, so motionless they were, and one's feet made no sound on the deep fallen leaves. And yet the silence was as music.

One tried to remember something one had once known about the flutes of autumn. The words gave one that exquisite joy which is close to melancholy. And in the whole place there was that strange mingling of joy and melancholy, which is so lonely a thing to feel. One's sense of strangeness deepened with the silence, all profound and intense about one, as one went on by the golden road. There was that same pungent, smoky smell of autumn in the woods, as one went through them, as if the purple mists, that trailed through the woods like incense down their aisles, really were the smoke of the year's golden burning. The misty, smoky wreaths of purple gathered in silently, all through the woods, under the gold. One came to the pool and kept along the edge of it. It gave one a strange feeling to look down at the perfect reflection in the pool. It was as if that were a dream of a dream. It was as if someone else were dreaming of one's dream, were almost with one in one's dream. One would have liked to pause and try to understand, but one could not.

A light shone out, sudden and golden, from a window of the house on the edge of the pool, and its reflection shone out beneath it in the pool. It seemed as if one could have passed into the house as easily from the door that was down there in the water as from the door above, and in the water house have found one's way, as easily as in the other, to the room from the window of which the light shone. That was the window on the left of the doorway. One passed it before one came to the door. The blinds were wide open.

In the vague dream colours of the room,—blues and greens as of water they were,—one saw a table, with two chairs drawn to it. It was a table of ebony, and it reflected in it everything that was upon it, as if in very dark, very still water. It seemed to one curious that the table should hold the things upon it in lovely repetition,—the antique bronze lamp, with red gold flame quite motionless in the motionless air; the jade bowl, full of some strange white flowers, that one had never seen before; the plate of autumn fruits, purple and green grapes and sun-burned

apricots and scarlet pomegranates; the two tall golden goblets, the crystal jar of water, that threw prismatic lights,—all perfect, inversely, just as the pool before the house held lovely, inverse repetition of the house and the sky and the motionless swans, there and yet not there, for one less real than all the unreal rest of it. It was, again, as if it were a dream of a dream. And one had a certainty that someone else was dreaming all of it,—that someone else was dreaming it, close to one, just over the edge of one's own dream, inversely, like a reflection. Someone else's dream came close to one's own dream, like the reflection in the pool of things on its edge, and like the little, intimate reflection of things in the ebony table.

Someone who was dreaming had just gone out of the room. Someone had put the old bronze lamp on the table, and had gone out of the room. The sense of a presence was most certain there, lingering, like a memory of a dream,—only with no growing of it fainter, as the memory of a dream grows, starlit, out of the other lights and

colours of one's waking. One would have been content to stand there at the window very long, but one could not. There were little, white, star shaped flowers, like those in the bowl, growing under the window, very fragrant, and very white in the gold track of light from the window. One went on past them to the door.

The dusk had gathered in upon the woods and the pool, where the swans still glimmered white. The swans glimmered white out of the purple dusk. The pool was of jade green no longer, but was the colour of the dusk, purple, with the reflections of the swans and of the house yet glimmering in it, and the reflection of the light from the window a golden glow in it, and the reflection of one star, one great, gold star,—that had come out in the west and hung low over the woods, — shining in it like a lamp. The odours of night and water and woods came to one in the dusk, with the autumn incense from the woods. And there came to one again the faint sound of music in the dusk, the almost imperceptible music of the flutes of autumn. It was a music that was

clear as water, and sweet as twilight, and delicate as a dream in the instant before it is broken.

The flutes of autumn sounded from the woods across the water to one, as one paused in the twilight at the door of the house on the edge of the pool. The doorway was an arch of shadow. One had come to it. One came to it often in one's imagining, but one never could go in.

"Not even with the gold key?" asked Marah, "might not one have opened the door there with the gold key?"

"No," said Daphne, in a sad little way.

The house on the edge of the pool, she said, was the house on the very edge of one's dream. And it was, one always felt it surely to be, on the edge of a dream that someone else was dreaming,—that someone else was dreaming toward one, on the other side of one's own dream, like the reflection of things in the ebony table, and in the pool, that first had been jade green, and then was of shadow. . . .

VIII

"ONCE upon a time," said Daphne, "there was a princess."

"Almost all stories are about princesses, aren't they, Daphne? Daphne, are all little girls princesses?"

"Yes," said Daphne.

She sat by the fire and told Marah this story in the nursery while Marah was having her supper. It was a rainy night, one could hear the rain all soft at the windows. The fire was burning quite low and making a soft little sound, like the rain. Marah and the little supper table and the porringer and Miss Etticoat were all quite close to the fire and to Daphne's chair.

"All little girls are princesses," said Daphne, "quite, quite all. And the one I am going to tell you about, she married the prince of a very, very far-away country."

"Are all little boys princes, Daphne?"

"All, quite all," said Daphne, "and they all come from very, very far-away countries."

"Why?" asked Marah, "why should it be that they all come from very, very far-away countries?"

"I don't know why," said Daphne, "but it is like that. All princes are of countries very, very far-away from the countries that the princesses they take away home with them ever have known."

"They take the princesses to live with them in those very, very far-away countries, Daphne?"

"Yes," said Daphne.

"And are not the princesses home-sick then for their own places, the way I should be for the woods and the swamp and the nursery and you?" asked Marah.

"I think all princesses are home-sick, Marah, quite all, for you see in the far-away countries they are taken to, and that they have to make their lives in, they find it very hard to understand."

"What was the name of the princess you are telling me about?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it was Marah. Perhaps it was Daphne."

"And what was the prince's name?" asked Marah.

"That I haven't the faintest idea of," said Daphne.

"How funny your stories are," said Marah, eating bread and milk. "Well, go on along with it, Daphne."

"The princess lived in a forest. She was the daughter of a poor witch woman,—"

"But, Daphne, you said she was a princess."

"It's quite the same thing. And you see how it was, Marah. She knew only the forest. She had never talked with anybody but birds and trees, and people like that. She had great knowledge of Indian pipes and acorn cups and those little blind, white, live things that there are when you turn over stones, don't you know, and of Venus slippers, and of the will-o'-the-wisps that dance in the swamp at night, and of the mists that wander the woods."

"The woods or the forest, Daphne?"

"It doesn't matter," said Daphne, "it was either way, do you see, where there was the silence and the peace."

"She knew lots about the swamp?" asked Marah.

"She knew quite all about the swamp, and she could sing most beautifully."

"I suppose, Daphne, the whip-poor-wills, and the bobolinks, and all of those, had taught her to sing."

"Indeed they had," said Daphne.

"And what did the prince know, Daphne, in his very, very far-away country?"

"The prince knew all about streets and palaces, and courts and pageants and ceremonies. He knew how to kiss a lady's hand and dance,—this step, that step, one to the right, two to the left, sweep the plume, hand on the heart,—and he knew how to sing."

"Had nightingales taught him, Daphne?"

"No, not nightingales, other princesses."

"What sort of princesses, Daphne?"

"Princesses with black rings painted round

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their eyes, and red cupid's bows drawn for their mouths, and all, quite all, dressed in jewels."

"How funny," said Marah.

"No, not funny," said Daphne. "You see, Marah, princesses like that can sing only very sad songs."

"Songs with no laugh in them?" said Marah.

"Songs," said Daphne, "that are saddest when most there is a laugh in them."

"And the princess of the forest, that you are telling me about, Daphne, what did she wear?"

"Tatters and rags," said Daphne, "and a cobweb cloak."

"Oh, that's nice," said Marah, "the cobweb cloak."

"Yes," said Daphne, in a queer little way, "yes, it is nice to have a cobweb cloak, a cloak of dreams and wistfulness and strangeness, that catches the light of the sun, and holds it, and that the wind blows. But it's rather sad, too, somehow,—"

Perhaps it was that Bridget Quinn came then to fetch Marah at bedtime, or perhaps it was just

that Daphne stopped her story, or began there in the midst of it to talk of other things. Marah never at all remembered.

Anyway, it was a long time before she heard the end of that story, and then it was in a way strange enough that she heard it, and in a very far-away country.

IX

AFTER Christmas every year, Bridget Quinn and Marah went to town to stop the winter with Marah's father.

The little girl was always happy, wildly, to be going to her father, but leaving Daphne was most dreadful. "Don't let anything happen to you while I'm away," she would implore, yet so very afraid that something might happen to her father before she could get to him. Somehow this year, it was more difficult than ever, she did not know why. She was just as anxious as ever to see her father. She was fond of Aunt Margaret too. Aunt Margaret was not lovely like Daphne, and one would never have known she cared about one at all, or how awfully nice she was, if one hadn't had a sore throat or measles or something. And the city was wonderful, just as wonderful as the country, only differently, with a quite other set of happinesses for one.

Marah was always sad, begging, "Don't let anything happen to you while I'm away," but Daphne always was so merry seeing her off, and the journey was such fun, and one's lunch in the train, and tea too, and it was so wonderful arriving, that the sadness passed out of it, somehow, as did all the sadnesses from the days of the little Marah.

But this year Marah had felt as she had never felt before about going away. Everything had been a little different, for no reason, of late. Daphne had been even dearer than ever, somehow. It seemed to Marah that she couldn't leave her.

In the weeping, wailing, late autumn days, in the dream days of Indian summer, all soft and hazy and still, in the bright whiteness of the early winter, in all the days outdoors and in the firelit evenings, the little girl had been dreading the time when she must go. This year, somehow, she could not speak of her dread of it. Somehow, this year, she had come to know that she must not speak of it to Daphne.

The night before she was to go away Bridget let her stay up late, really late, in Daphne's room. The wind cried in the chimney. The wind came through the hills and through the woods and cried in the chimney. It made one feel very intimate and cosey, and yet, somehow, very sad and most lonely. It was as if all the things one felt and could not say were crying to one in the wind.

Daphne sat in a big, low chair with many cushions, and the firelight was about her. Marah sat on the rug at her feet, and was popping corn. She shook the little wire cage of the corn popper over the fire, and the yellow kernels popped into white fluffs, and the smell of it was most comforting.

Marah rattled the corn popper over the glowing, deep, red, wood embers, and did not,—on purpose, for some reason,—look up at Daphne. It was quite the right sort of fire for roasting corn, the flames all gone and the embers like a beautiful, alive, wonderfully coloured bowl. The soft, lacy frills of Daphne's skirt were close

beside her, and Daphne's little scarlet slippers peeped out from the lace on the footstool. The scarlet slippers had very high heels and very pointed toes and very big rosettes of lace. From time to time Marah would put out her hand, that was not occupied with the corn popper, and pat the little scarlet slippers on the footstool, but neither Daphne nor she talked at all.

For no reason Marah had an odd notion that they were waiting for something. It seemed to her as if they were waiting, as if all the room and all the world were waiting for something that was going to happen, perhaps,—or perhaps just for something that there was to be said.

In the waiting there was just the sound of the wind in the chimney. The wind in the chimney had the sound of the sea in it, though there was no sea, except very, very far away, distant as the city where Marah's father lived. The wind had all the sobbing of the sea in it. It made Marah think of the "thing" that Daphne told her of the wind's sounding like the sea, there, in the pines, down the Allée Noire, for the some-

one who was alone in the forest. And it had another sort of sobbing in it. It had in it the sound of the voice of the city, that Marah knew so well when it came to her and to her father in the lumber room of the house on Washington Square. The sound of the city always came like a sobbing to them, to her father and to her, there, when he played the violin. And now the wind seemed to have brought the sound of the city to her and Daphne, so very far away. The sobbing of the city was in the wind like the sobbing of the sea. It was as if there were the great sea of life sobbing and sobbing all about one, where one was in one's life's safe, set-apart little island. The corn popped away cheerily.

After a while Daphne said, her little scarlet slippers moving under the laces as she leaned forward a little in the chair, "Marah, I am going to tell you the words of a song. Perhaps you will remember it a little, and know one day why I told it to you." And then she began to say a thing, that was like singing, though it was not singing. As she said the curious words of the

song in her soft, low, still voice, they seemed to belong, somehow, together with the sound of the wind in the chimney,—

“I went out from my garden into the wilderness.

“I followed the one who called to me,—the one who had come to the world that he should call to me and whom I had come to the world that I should follow.

“So ever it had been willed.

“I went out from the garden of spices, wherein did the vine flourish and the pomegranate bud forth. I left the myrrh that I had gathered and the honeycomb that I had scarcely tasted, and the wine there was for me to drink with my white bread.

“I went out by the way from which there is no shadow of turning, which way he must take who called to me and whom I must follow.”

Her voice fell suddenly.

“It’s rather like ‘over the uttermost purple

rim,' isn't it?" said Marah, "the two of them going?"

The popcorn was half done in its little wire cage. Marah took it back from over the fire and opened the cage and touched the hot, white fluffs with the tip of her fingers. It was queer how Daphne's song belonged with all sobbing sounds, of seas and cities and the wind in the chimney, and it was lonely and strange and gave one the queerest feeling as one snapped the lid of the corn popper and went on shaking it again over the ember bowl.

"Daphne, tell me about it in the wilderness, the one who called, and the one who followed; they were together, all two of them, weren't they, in the wilderness?"

"And the wilderness blossomed as the rose," said Daphne, and as if she'd forgotten Marah, she said again all radiantly, "the wilderness blossomed as the rose."

"Then it isn't a sad song," said Marah.

"For a little hour," said Daphne, "one little hour, the wilderness blossomed as the rose." And

she went on with the song she did not sing.

*"The blossoming of roses is over and gone,
storms have trodden the wilderness. The one
who called is gone from me.*

*"The one I followed is gone from me, and
where he is gone, there I may not follow.*

"It was as it had to be,

"And it is as it is,

*"And there is no returning, from the wilder-
ness there is no returning.*

*"I have eaten my bread with tears, and lain
me down to sleep with sorrow."*

Then Daphne's voice stopped, quite shortly,
as if, however much more there might be to say,
she could not say it.

"Then it is a very sad song," said Marah, "it
is a song that my father would make the violin
sing, most sadly."

"Some day you will know why I told it you,"
said Daphne; "and remember, Marah, the last
words, 'I have eaten my bread with tears, and

lain me down to sleep with sorrow.'” She held her fragile, white hands out to the fire, as if they were cold and needed to warm them. The light seemed to glow through them, as though they were transparent. They did not trouble Marah at all.

“Marah,” said Daphne, “Marah, tell me, are you happy?”

“Oh, yes,” said Marah, popping corn.

BOOK II

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I

It was odd that the city nursery belonged to Bridget Quinn so much more completely than the nursery at home, or even than the woods and fields and the swamp.

At home the people of faery dwelt, as a matter of course, in all the land. It was a world they naturally, one knew, would choose to dwell in. One could not imagine their *not* choosing it,—just of their own fancy, for their own pleasure; but to the city it was Bridget herself who had brought them, “a-trapsin’ along,” and she who kept them close, the merry, wistful, little people, and it was at her call they would come out from,—she never would tell what hiding-places,—to “glamour” the little Marah.

The poor little Marah, perhaps it would happen to her to be “glamoured” always, to be one of those, a little strange, a little sad, very happy people, who pass up and down, here and there,

through the world, but are not of it, who walk in the earth's ways, with feet that seem not to touch the dust or the flowers, people of no place, nor of any belonging, happy enough, and yet with always about them somehow that visionary melancholy which is left over upon the world from the mood of its ancient peoples.

However that might be, Bridget Quinn was a person more than a little wonderful to have had in one's child days.

The other little girls walking in Fifth Avenue with their smart nurses, had smarter curls than Marah's, and a smarter little air about their hats and jackets, and very likely they would grow up to be smarter women of the world, but they never would have a certain *something* that Bridget Quinn, the little old woman in the green shawl, gave to Marah. They, perhaps, did not get the fantastic, extravagant fancy that could people a sombre city room with "green jacket, red cap and white owl's feather," or the curiously intimate faith that kept the "Blessed Vargin" so very near the nursery, the light-heartedness that

throws off all yesterdays and to-morrows, and the melancholy that is so close a part of joy.

It was Bridget Quinn who could pray the grand prayers, when the fancy took her, so very different from Aunt Margaret's. Aunt Margaret came every night to the nursery to hear Marah say, "Now I lay me," and "Our Father," kneeling by the bed in mortal fear of something under it that might clutch her nighty as she scrambled up. "God bless father and Daphne,—" she would say, knowing Aunt Margaret didn't awfully much care about God's blessing Daphne,— "and make Marah be a good girl.—But Aunt Margaret, what's God got to do with it? And if he can make me good, why on earth doesn't he? I do think religion queer, Aunt Margaret. If God can make me a good girl, and then doesn't, that's his fault, and I must say it's awfully queer of him, Aunt Margaret, and I don't at all understand him — And bless dear Bridget Quinn and all the Irish, and all animals, especially that horse that fell down at the corner to-day in front

of where they were selling peanuts, don't you know,— and all our dear dogs at home, especially the yellow one that the coachman gave me, and also especially Daphne's chestnut mare. *Per omnia sæcula sæculorum. Amen.*"

The house in the city was big and sombre; no matter how much the sunlight tried, it could not make the rooms, with their dark old woodwork and their dark old hangings, anything but grave. The chairs and sofas were very big and cold and slippery, and never were moved out of their places. The tables had marble tops, and the things on them, the lamps, the books, the vases of stiffly arranged flowers, stood on little mats, with fringes. Aunt Margaret, who lived with Marah's father and "kept house," was herself just like that. Her tall, dark, stiff dresses made a little noise, her beautiful hands, with many rings, never did anything that surprised one; nothing of her ever was different, and her voice was grey and stiff.

Marah's room and her schoolroom looked out upon Washington Square. She looked over at

the arch, and the bare winter trees, and the people, and the sparrows, and the ugly buildings away across, and found it all very interesting. Over across the square, and away to either side of it, and away on either side of Fifth Avenue,—where she walked, soberly, every day, with Miss Sinclair, who came to give her lessons,—stretched out the unknown land that she had heard Susan, the nursery maid, call “the great and wicked city,” wherein dwelt a people called the “poor,” and where about there stalked such things as “want,” and “crime,” of which Susan knew. The voice of the “great and wicked city” came to Marah in the streets, when she walked out with Miss Sinclair. Bridget could not take her in the streets, Aunt Margaret wouldn’t have it, because of the green shawl. It appeared that the niece of Aunt Margaret could not possibly walk in the streets with a Bridget in a green shawl. And it was the grand shawl, it was, and not for a world of Aunt Margarets would Bridget have worn anything else. So there you had it.

Miss Sinclair was almost as great a person as

Aunt Margaret. But that troubled Marah very little. One couldn't run or dance beside her or laugh or sing or chatter, as one would with Bridget Quinn; one must have on one's gloves, and one's boots must be buttoned and one's hair tied back, but for all that one could listen to the city's voice, while one walked in Fifth Avenue beside her, just as well as one could listen, when one walked in the country with Bridget, to the voices of the woods and the fields.

The city's voice in the streets was so close that it seemed to Marah as if the "great and wicked" thing it was must be pressing near for her to touch. It must be just there in the side streets, waiting for her. She would have liked to go down the side streets and meet it. It had to do with organ men, and monkeys, and little girls who had no hats and had bare feet, and with women who had babies, and with yellow dogs, and push carts full of all sorts of things. It made one want to go where people crowded, to belong with all the crowding people. It had to do with cable cars, and the trains on the elevated

railroad, and the boats on the river, and with their whistles and with the whistles of the big factories across the river, and the creaking of big, loaded trucks, and the being called out of all sorts of things to sell. It had to do with everybody's calling and laughing and crying, and it seemed queer that one must be always kept away from it all, walking with Miss Sinclair.

The voice came to the schoolroom too. Marah could hear it all the time she did her lessons. At home, when Daphne gave her lessons, she always told herself stories. But at Aunt Margaret's with Miss Sinclair she never did, she just listened and listened to the voice of the city. The schoolroom was just like all the rest of the house and like Aunt Margaret, and yet it never troubled one. Indeed one was very fond of it. The voice of the city came to one there quite differently from the way it came to one in the streets. All its different sounds were blurred together, as if all the comings and goings, all the buildings up and tearings down, were blended together in the saying of just some one thing.

Sometimes Marah almost thought she could understand what that thing was.

One day to punish her for something she'd done, Miss Sinclair locked her up to spend all the afternoon in the schoolroom, and it was so delightful that she decided that always after she'd do that sort of thing every time she could. She sat through all the afternoon's short sunshine curled up in the window ledge, just listening to the city's voice. When the thin, clear, winter sunshine was gone, and the lamps of the square were lighted, and the stars and the windows of all the great and wicked city, when the schoolroom was quite dark except for the dull red glow of the coal fire in the grate, it was as if all the city were keeping her company, just as the woods had always done.

The glow of the firelight was very still in the room. It did not draw the shadows out of the corners, as did the lights of the great wood fire at home, to dance along the walls, and it did not reach out about the room for bright things to play with, it only glowed a very little on the legs

of the heavy, old table and on the brass knobs of the desk drawers.

The city's voice went on and on. Huddled in the window sill, Marah measured out a rhythm for it, "On and on,— and on and on and on,—" It went with the ticking of the schoolroom clock, so solemn there on the mantel shelf, tick-tock, tick-tock, on and on and on. On and on and on, tick-tock, tick-tock, went the clock and the city's voice together, on and on and on, tick-tock, tick-tock.

And like that everything of the world was going, all the minutes.

Now was now,— this minute,— and before one thought it, it was gone. And in the next minute, anything might happen, and one could not know, and could not stop it, and then it too was gone. And it all went on and on like that till one was dead. And then it all went on and on without one just the same.

And all the people went on and on, tick-tock, tick-tock, as the minutes went, so many, many people, and none of them ever understanding, every-

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one of them going on and on, quite alone, until he died. And then all the others going still on and on and on.

And one went on oneself, and felt things and nobody knew; and one couldn't ever, ever make anybody know. One couldn't even oneself know what it was one felt — why certain things like the city's voice made one want something, want it really dreadfully, never all the time knowing what it was.

And, always wanting and never knowing, one just went on and on and on. One had one's supper, and slept, and had one's breakfast. And want and crime stalked on through the great and wicked city of the poor. And one was not afraid. And it wasn't only because Miss Sinclair kept one from it that one was not afraid. It was because of something that one felt, awfully, and almost understood, but not quite. One almost knew, at certain moments, when one felt a certain way. But even when one was nearest it, like this afternoon, it was gone, understanding of it was gone, even the feeling of it was gone; and one couldn't

make it come back, ever — until it did just of itself — And one just had to go on, waiting and wondering, and going always on and on. The something that was in all things, that one never knew, was close to Marah, in the dusky schoolroom, that day, when she was being punished. She looked out upon the city and felt the wonder of its going on and on and on . . . tick-tock, tick-tock. . . .

Then Aunt Margaret came. She unlocked the door and opened it and came in. Marah looked over to her tall, thin, straight figure, standing in the doorway, against the light from the hall. Aunt Margaret was very tall, and she always wore her grey hair piled very high on top of her head, with very high combs standing up in it, so that she looked taller than anybody else in the world.

“What does this mean, Marah?” she said, in her voice that made everything seem so very important. “Quinn, you may light the gas and go.”

Bridget Quinn was behind Aunt Margaret in

the doorway. She was rubbing her eyes with the corner of her apron and when she lit the gas it surprised Marah very much to see that she had been crying.

"Oh, Biddy, darling, what's the matter?"

"Biddy's little lamb, locked up alone, oh, the shame of it!"

"But, Biddy, I had such a nice time. I didn't mind a bit, I'd much rather! I hope she'll do it often, really, Biddy, don't cry."

"You may go, Quinn," said Aunt Margaret.

She came over to Marah. "Now you must tell me, Marah."

"You mean about the going on and on?"

"For what was it Miss Sinclair punished you, Marah?"

"I don't know."

"You must know, Marah."

"Truly, I don't," said Marah, a little troubled.

"You told a lie," said Aunt Margaret.

"Oh, yes, that was it," said Marah with relief, scrambling down from the window sill. "I had forgotten."

"You told a lie," said Aunt Margaret, making it sound quite horrible; "you told a lie, and you could forget it, and you say, 'Oh, yes, that was it,' as if it were the lightest thing."

"But when one can't remember, why, one can't," said Marah. "What did I tell the lie about, Aunt Margaret?"

She had come over to Aunt Margaret, and they stood there looking down and up at one another, under the double gas jet, by the school-room table.

Aunt Margaret's eyes were hard, sharp, steel-bright points that sought for something in the deep, dream-filled eyes of the little Marah.

"I cannot understand you," said Aunt Margaret.

"No," said Marah.

II

MARAH's father was the brother of Aunt Margaret. He and she had always lived in the house on Washington Square. They had had a father and a mother once upon a time, and they had been a little boy and girl. Marah often wanted to ask questions about that time, it seemed so strange to believe in, but neither her father nor Aunt Margaret was the sort of person one could ask questions of. Her father was taller, much, even than Aunt Margaret, and he spoke even less than she did, and one was silent when one was with him, because he looked so proud. Marah did not know what it was that was so proud about him: perhaps the way he was so tall and straight, or the way he never quite opened his eyes, or the way he used his long hands, or perhaps it was his voice, or perhaps it was the way he had of treating one,—Miss Sinclair, or Aunt Margaret, or Bridget Quinn, or Marah,—as if one were very

proud oneself. Or perhaps it was that he never, never talked to one about anything except proud and polite things, and that one never, never, however much one wanted to, could talk to him about anything except about things like that. It made loving him a very curious and unexpected and surprising affair.

Marah would have liked to keep both the great drawing-rooms always full of beautiful people, to whom she could have shown h^hm, and say, "This is my father." She would probably have been nothing but proud of him if it had not been for the violin. Because of that she loved him. And it was because she loved him that afterwards, long afterwards, when need came, she could not forgive him. When she had need to forgive him it was because of the violin and the lumber room that she could not.

When he played the violin upstairs in the room they called theirs, that was really the lumber room, and that was so shabby and dusty and cold, where the mice scampered at dusk as they did in the attic of the house in the woods, and where no

one else but the mice and they two ever came, he was quite a different person from the person he was down in the drawing-rooms.

"Never you tell, little girl," he would say, "never you tell them, any of them, that you know a man like this, a vagabond, a shabby sort of person, who might have done all sorts of wonderful, beautiful, crazy, mad things, if only something had been different. I don't want them to know, d'you see? I don't want anybody but you to know."

Sometimes she wanted to say, "Not even Daphne?" But she never did. She used often to speak of her father to Daphne, but she never spoke of Daphne to him. She did not know why not, only somehow, she could not. She wanted to say, "I wish Daphne knew you like this,"—but she never said it, she never could say it.

He would come for her to the nursery, when Miss Sinclair would have gone home of an evening, and take her away from Bridget Quinn, who didn't mind at all. Sometimes it would be after

supper, and sometimes it was when she was just having supper, and then she'd jump up and go with him, not waiting an instant, and sometimes it would be before supper and she wouldn't have any supper at all, and she liked that. He and she would run upstairs to that room on the servants' floor, run fast, so that nobody'd see, and he'd shut the door and lock it, so nobody could come in, and he'd light the gas, that burned very badly, and bundle her up in the worn out old steamer rugs that were there, and make a throne for her on a pile of old books and things, and give her a paper bag of hot roast chestnuts to keep her hands warm, for always there was chill in the lumber room. Then he would take off his fine coat, and put on the old, faded, torn, tramp jacket he kept hanging behind the door there, and he would take off his smart collar and knot round his throat the dingy black scarf that belonged with the old jacket, and he'd all rumple up his hair that was almost quite grey. There was just the one gas jet standing out from the wall beside a pile of old furniture. It flared and whistled if

one turned it up at all, so they kept it burning low, and the light was always dim upon the old rubbish room. The odds and ends of furniture, all the inconsequent, unwanted things of the house, discarded, stood there, a disreputable company. But Marah was fond of them, they were such vagabond things, like her father, somehow, as she knew him in their room, belonging nowhere and to no one, things nobody thought of, and that had something of mystery about them, for all they were so friendly and intimate, something taken unto themselves from the dust and dimness of their exile.

Her father would stand a long time polishing his violin with the big silk handkerchief he always kept wrapped round it, and she would wait, a very, very happy little girl. Then he would tuck the violin under his chin, and draw the bow across it a time or two, and begin to play, his head on one side, the violin cuddled against his neck, his long, spare figure swaying a little, the touch of his hands very loving on his instrument, his eyes quite closed. To the little Marah it was wonder-

ful. She would sit breathless. All the unworded things of the world were for her in the singing of the violin, almost worded. When the violin sang to her in the cold, dusty lumber room where the gas jet flared and whistled, she almost understood.

"It's pretty poor playing," her father would say to her, when he had finished, standing, his vision gone, looking down at the little wide-eyed girl, whose vision yet lasted. "Pretty poor playing. I ought not to let you think otherwise, Marah. It's like everything else I do in my life, everything I've been, pretty poor."

III

ONE day Marah had an especially nice time. It was a horrid day in January, a day when it seemed as if one simply couldn't go for one's walk with Miss Sinclair. Marah had done something wrong anyway, and Miss Sinclair was offended anyway, and so was Aunt Margaret, who had been most disapproving all through luncheon. And so, as long as she was about it, she might just as well go on and do some wrong things more. And she had the grand idea.

She got ready for their walk quicker than did Miss Sinclair and went downstairs. Bridget Quinn quite expected her to wait downstairs for Miss Sinclair. But she did not. She stopped in Aunt Margaret's room as she went by,—Aunt Margaret was in the drawing-room she knew,—and she took Aunt Margaret's purse, with lots of money in it, out of Aunt Margaret's muff where it was on a chair. Then she went on downstairs

and opened the front door, and went out into Washington Square.

She ran across Washington Square in the wind and dust and cold. It was one of those days when New York rings with the cold, and the hard sound of all the city's living strikes back as it were, metallic, from the bright, hard, high, blue dome of the sky. The houses of the square struck out at one somehow with an emphasis of line and colour that hurt one's nerves like a scraping sound. It was not that Marah thought these things, but she felt them. She had felt them all day. The faces of the people one passed in the square were hard in just that sounding way, as if there were no softness of dreaming in the souls behind the look of them, but only a conflict of sharp desires and definite businesses. The dust swept round Marah in spiral whirls and struck at her face, but she did not care. She was going into the "great and wicked city" wherein the housemaid said dwelt "want and crime," and she was going to give a party and invite all the people.

She crossed the street from the square and turned down a street called Sullivan Street. It was about three o'clock of the January afternoon. The sun was gone out of that street and the wind was colder than ever there, driving dust about the curb and into the areas and whipping the clothes lines that hung empty across the street and rattling the loose, cheap signboards. The signboards were nearly all written in Italian. The people in the streets were nearly all of them talking in Italian. It was as if one had turned suddenly out of Washington Square into that something of Italy which is hard and grey and threatening somehow, for all it has, else than that, of softness and azure and dreams. The whole sound of the quarter was the sound of Italy. It was a Sunday afternoon; the whole quarter was out in the street. The men with their coat collars turned up and their shabby felt hats pulled down over their eyes, and the women with shawls over their heads, stood about together, not talking much in the alien cold. The black-eyed children with gold ear-rings

played up and down noisily, shrieking in one shrill Italian patois or another, or in the shriller patois of this, their new city. Here and there some vivid colour of a woman's skirt or shawl, or a little girl's dress, stood out in the hard grey of the street. The street that turned to the right was full of the long, level afternoon sunshine. It was Bleecker Street and the Madonna dei Pompeii with its little white campanile turned half to face the street, was touched with gold as hard as the glint of coins. The smoke from the black chimneys blew down into the street and seemed to whirl with the grey dust in its gusts and eddies. The iron fire escapes and balconies, the broken shutters of the windows, the dingy stone and brick edges of things, had shadows all hard and clear cut and black, like ugly sounds. The wind was driving a lot of papers about the street, and sent them rattling down into a basement from which came out the noise of voices and of a hurdy-gurdy and of shuffling feet. The swinging doors of the basement banged to many people's going up and down. The warm glow

of the chestnut vendor's brazier, the noise from the basement, the smell of beeswax and leather from a cobbler's shop, and oranges from a push cart, of garlic and cheese from everywhere, were swept about with the papers and dust and smoke in the wind.

The man who sold hot roast chestnuts looked like a monkey, and he was chattering like a monkey to a woman who had a baby in her arms and two rather big little girls hanging on to her skirts. Marah went to the woman and said, "If you please, may your little girls come to my party?"

The woman looked down at her from under the folds of a red woollen shawl. The ends of the shawl were wrapped round the baby, and the baby's big black eyes looked out at Marah from under red folds too.

"I want to have a party," said Marah, "and I don't know anybody here, and I thought your little girls might have friends we could ask, you see. I have quite a lot of money to buy us chestnuts and oranges and things."

The woman stared at her out of the red shawl.

"No speka Inglee," she said, but the bigger of her little girls said, "We eta de orange," looking at Marah with rapturous black eyes from the shelter of her mother's skirts.

"Wat she up ter?" asked the old man of the chestnuts. He came round to Marah from behind his brazier and said, "Wat yer got there, kid?" and snatched the purse out of Marah's hand. Marah never quite knew what he would have done with it, but the bigger of the two little girls let go of her mother's skirts and began to shriek, "He tooka de mon! He tooka de mon!" and people were around them in half a minute. "He tooka de mon!" shrieked the little girl, pointing at the old man and appealing to everybody. And she turned to Marah, pointing at her and shrieking, "Et vas the kid's mon. The kid her was for to blow it in." She turned on the man who had come over from the push cart of oranges, "Et vas for to buy yer oranges," she said.

The orange cart man was young and big. He

left his cart and elbowed through the crowd. "What's up?" he said.

The woman of the baby and little girls began talking wildly in Italian. The orange man turned on the chestnut man.

"Give it back, see? You and yer chestnuts, bah! I'm on ter it too, see? The kid wants to blow it in, see? None er yer monkey tricks, now."

The old man whimpered and gave up the purse.

"I want to have a party," explained Marah. "I want to buy all the things there's money for and invite all the people I can have enough to eat for."

The crowd was very thick now about her. The orange cart man stood tall in the crowd and held her purse where nobody could get it. All the people were talking. She could not understand very well what they were saying, neither the Italian nor the English. She knew Italian only as Daphne had taught it to her, and could talk it only with the "thou," that she and Daphne always used together. She felt it would be polite to repeat her invitation in the language of

these people. She said, "I must give thee the 'thou' as if thou wast all one person that I loved, and I pray thou wilt forgive mistakes. It is that I have all the money I could get, and I would make a festival. Wilt thou not be my guest, and help me buy things?"

She knew that all the faces she looked round at were ready to be friendly to her. Even the crooked-faced man who felt her fur collar and took her muff out of her hands and put his very dirty hands inside it, did not really mean to be unpleasant.

Marah heard somebody whisper to him, "Might be something doing, eh? Sorter kid they'd put up a peep for." The crooked-faced man said, "Too many round. We'd be give away." Then they saw that Marah was listening, and they looked so disturbed that she said, "Don't mind, please, I didn't understand any-way." She said to the orange man who held her purse, "There are enough people here now for a party. I'll take all your oranges and the old man's chestnuts and whatever's left will do for

other things people want. You're tall and can see everybody and you can make everybody understand. Please will you attend to it for me?"

"We'll have to hustle," said the big, young orange man, less to Marah than to the crowd, "if a cop come along, he might be getting too attentive." He gave a very rude cuff to someone who was trying to get the purse out of his hand and said some words that it was fortunate Aunt Margaret was not there to hear.

It was the crooked-faced man who took complete possession of Marah's party. He made a great success of the party. He stood guard over the push cart of oranges while the orange man doled them out, to the little children of the crowd first, and then to the bigger, till all the oranges were gone. He made every child go up and thank Marah for its orange, and the mothers and fathers of the children laughed and chattered and thanked Marah too. And when it was the turn of the chestnuts he saw to it that nobody who had an orange could have chestnuts, and that all the little girls were served first, as is

proper at parties. The crooked-faced man was small and very ugly, but he seemed to be a most important person in the crowd, even the big man of the oranges did just as the little crooked-faced man told him. The chestnut man's chestnuts were welcomed especially because they were hot, and people were cold, and the whole distribution of oranges and chestnuts was gone through so quickly that Marah's party seemed to be coming far too soon to an end. There seemed to be trouble over the dividing of the money, between the chestnut man and the orange man, but the crooked-faced man settled it quickly and kept quite a lot of money left over. He said that nobody but Crooked Mug Pete himself should fleece that kid, which made Marah laugh, for of course she was the kid and he was Pete. He was a very funny man.

He and Marah decided that what money was left after the oranges and chestnuts should be spent for the mothers and fathers in hot coffee and hot mysterious other things to drink down in the basement of the swinging doors, which cer-

tainly was a very friendly place. The big, young orange man picked Marah up and set her on his shoulder high out of the crowd that packed the basement room, and Crooked Mug Pete told everybody in the room how she had blowed the whole bunch of kids, and how now she was going to blow everybody as hadn't the price, and those as was in and was warm could get back and make room for those as hadn't had nothing. "She's the grand kid," he said, "and don't you forget it." Everybody did just about what he wanted and everybody was awfully nice to Marah. They put a chair for her on top of the table, where the bottles were, and the man of the place let her pour out things for everybody, and nobody let anybody have more than his share or hers, and everybody liked Marah. She talked to everybody in half English, half Italian, and she kissed lots of babies and the mothers of lots of babies kissed her, and she gave her muff to one little girl and her fur collar to another and was so sorry that she hadn't anything else to give,—except Daphne's gold beads, which, as she ex-

plained, she couldn't give away because Daphne had loved them when she was a little girl. They all quite understood and Crooked Mug Pete said to her, "Say, kid, if yer want to tell yer blokes a grand story, tell 'em you've been with Crooked Mug Pete to a place where the police ain't any too anxious to go, and tell them that nobody bothered yer beads down there, and tell 'em yer had a good time there, wich there's many as wouldn't."

Marah did have a good time there. They kept the hurdy-gurdy squeaking, and somebody sang a song, and everybody else sang the chorus, and a woman with red hair danced in the little space they could clear in the middle of the floor, and then everybody danced, and the orange man danced with Marah on his shoulder.

She would have liked to stay there for years and years, only somebody said, and then everybody said, she'd better not, she didn't understand why. It seemed to have vaguely to do with a policeman and Aunt Margaret. When she went home, the orange man carried her all the way

along Bleecker Street and Sullivan Street, and a lot of people went with them who were awfully sorry to say good-bye to her. They left her at the bottom of the square, and many of them kissed her good-bye and she herself kissed Crooked Mug Pete. And then she ran fast because she was a little afraid of Aunt Margaret.

It seemed to her best, under the circumstances, to go in by the basement door. She had judged rightly in that, for Cook, who let her in, was in a "great state." All the household was in a great state, Cook said, over her disappearance. Cook and the others got her more or less clean before she went upstairs and faced Aunt Margaret. Aunt Margaret really and truly was "takin' on dreadful," and everybody seemed to be telephoning to everybody. "I was just in the schoolroom reading," she said to Aunt Margaret and Miss Sinclair. Of course it was a very stupid lie, and much bigger than she need have told, and nobody believed it. She had to tell something of truth anyway, for she couldn't let Aunt Margaret think the housemaid had taken the

purse. There was trouble also about the furs, but the nice time Marah had had was worth any trouble. "I would tell you all about it if I could," she said to Aunt Margaret; "it isn't that I want to deceive, only, really, Aunt Margaret, it's much better for you not to know."

IV

It was because of her social successes that Marah got into deepest trouble with Aunt Margaret and Miss Sinclair. She got into disgrace every Tuesday from four to six. Every Tuesday the same thing happened. Miss Sinclair usually took her to the dancing class, but sometimes Aunt Margaret went with her. The mothers of the dancing class children were all people Aunt Margaret was willing to know. That fact alone interested Marah enormously in them. They must be wonderful people indeed if Aunt Margaret were willing to know them; because most of the people of the world, Aunt Margaret said, one simply couldn't acknowledge.

For Marah "people one couldn't acknowledge" were just everybody, like Daphne and Bridget Quinn, and the poor, and the Blessed Virgin and the Sidhe-folk, and the little red-capped cobbler leprechauns, and Queen Maev, and all the rest

of them, so dear and familiar to one that one needn't especially bother about them. But the people one could know, indeed rather had to know, possessed for her the mystery of all incomprehensible things. Their being better, so enormously much better, than other people, interested her. And somehow, it always made her want to do quite dreadful, shocking things when Aunt Margaret or Miss Sinclair took her so importantly among them.

She went to the dancing class in her white embroidered dress and her pink sash,— she hated pink, the name of it was so ugly,— with quite a sense of plunging into depths unknown.

Bleecker Street was as much her own country as the woods at home, or the forest of Daphne's "things." Crooked Mug Pete and the Happy Princess were kindly, good friends of hers, but the people of the dancing class, those wonderful mothers of the little girls and boys, and the little girls and boys themselves,— faith, but they were the queer things to her!

The mothers were all friends of Aunt Mar-

garet. They all wore fine dresses and came in fine carriages and motors, and said quite cross things to one another very sweetly, and looked at each other's little boys and girls in a way that would have made the little boys and girls most unhappy if they had been Marah. These little girls, all in white embroidered dresses,—did nobody know how beautiful were yellow and brown and grey and green,—and those little boys, whose mothers had fairly to drive them to their partners, they were most interesting to Marah, and almost every Tuesday from four to six she was possessed of a great and evil desire to make them like her, not just to make them like her nicely, in a proper Aunt Margaret and Miss Sinclair sort of way, but to make them like her so much that they would disobey their mothers and Mr. Pollack, who taught the dancing class, and their governesses and their nurses, and everything that was theirs, all for the sake of pleasing her, Marah.

Certainly she had the best time of anybody at the dancing class. There was not a little girl

of them all who could, as Bridget would have said, hold a candle to her.

When they boasted of how grand their people were, with this big house in town, and that big house up the river, and the other big house on the rocks, and of how this great person and that came to visit mamma and big sister, Marah told them of Fairy Greens and of Druid wells, and of the great castle with thousands of towers that she came from, and of queens who visited her in the nursery, and were friends of Bridget's, and of the saints who came there too, all dressed in bright lights, she said they were, and making the lilies to grow tall and white where their feet trod on the nursery floor. Poor little other children, how could they but be humble, for all their boasting of Mrs. This and Mrs. That, before Marah, friend of saints in halos and faery troopin' all in green.

The other children danced their little steps, poor souls, and thought that they did well with their "slide, slide, slide, kick," and their "one, two, three; one, two, three"; but there were times

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when Marah would have them all with their shoes and stockings off, before anybody could stop it, and get them all doing the break-down, that Bridget used to dance on the turf of Killoonhayan Green.

V

SUDDENLY, in the midst of winter, there came a day when there was nothing but the thought of spring in the world. Spring was all day with the sunshine in Washington Square. It was a sunshine quite different, for the new gold of it, and the haze in the gold, and its wonderful opalescence, from any other season's sunshine. And the shadows were spring shadows, purple and velvety, all soft; different from the black, thin, sharp-edged winter shadows. Spring was in the sky behind the chimneys, in the pale far-off blue that melted,—down the long, straight streets,—into sunlit mists. In the streets the wet asphalt reflected red walls and brown and grey, and long green streaks from lamp posts, and gold glints from one didn't know what. They had been selling violets at the corner, and the smell of them was all mingled with the smell of wet pavements, and of the wet, sun-warmed earth in the flower

beds of the square. It seemed as if the twigs of the trees in the square were colouring a little already, blurred and softened and tinted by the mounting and flowing of the sap through them. And all the sounds, of sparrows and barrel organs, of siren whistles from the misty river, of passing wheels and feet, of street calls, all the city's life noises, came to one softened by something atmospheric that is of springtime only.

It was if the voice of the city were softened a little, were gentler than usual. Marah was all day especially happy. In the woods at home there would be stirring of winter-stilled pulses, a drawing of long waking breath, a changing, magical, imperceptible, of old browns and greys to vague colour tones, that deepened exquisitely down all the distances. Everywhere one would feel the new life that stirred unseen. Through the bare branches and between the boles of the trees, down all the open woodways, one would see the sky of robin's egg blue. Already the branches of the trees would have lost their keenness of outline and be blurred in the distances, though

near by one could not see the change. The hills would be all swept with sunlight and shadow, changing from yellow and grey to blue and purple. The lichen would be quite yellow against the sun-touched tree trunks, and the moss would be very green among the brown leaves, beside the snow patches. One would think of pussie willows, before very long to be out on the edge of the swamp, and imagine, almost, that one smelt the trailing arbutus, some day to be hiding under the brown leaves where yet the snow was left in hollow places. Soon one would hear the robins calling to the wood's winter people, the squirrels and the rabbits. One was extremely alive as one walked that afternoon in Fifth Avenue, with Miss Sinclair.

All the sparrows were out, and all the barrel organs, and the sellers of "V'lets — quarter 'er bunch" — and of "straw-ber-ries."

The snow was melting and the streets ran like rivers. The wet asphalt reflected gold and bronze glints from the sunlight, and blurs of colour, red thrown from the bricks of one house,

yellow from the pale stone of the house beyond, red again, and then brown, and then green from a row of closed blinds. The long, straight streets led east and west in narrowing perspective. The black bulk of the elevated railroad crossed the streets like heavy, black bridges, and along the streets, to the east and west,—if only Miss Sinclair would have gone those ways,—one would have had glimpses of the river, wide and shining, and of hideous warehouses across it that the sunny mists made to look like castles.

Marah walked through the spring, soberly, beside Miss Sinclair. They walked up to 34th Street, just as they did almost every afternoon, and then turned and walked back again. From below 23rd Street a street ragamuffin boy kept just ahead of them nearly all the way down the avenue. He whistled and shuffled and skipped along, and stopped to dance little clumsy dances, and dragged a clapping stick all the way against the area railings. Marah wondered if Miss Sinclair knew at all, at all, how he felt.

Suddenly, for some reason, she looked up at

Miss Sinclair. Miss Sinclair wore eyeglasses. Miss Sinclair's eyes behind the eyeglasses were full of tears. "Why—why—" said Marah, "why—what is it, Miss Sinclair?"

Miss Sinclair carried a neat little black bag always. She opened it and took out a neat little handkerchief and blew her nose. "What is what, Marah?" she said.

"What is the matter, that you are crying about, Miss Sinclair?"

"Don't turn round like that when you walk in the street, Marah, you are almost walking backwards, staring at me; and don't stare."

"But you are crying," said Marah, "and I'm so sorry."

"Walk straight on, Marah, and don't talk to me, and stop swinging your arms."

Marah walked straight on and did not speak and did not swing her arms. It seemed to her suddenly dreadfully wrong that she had been so happy when Miss Sinclair was crying like that. Poor Miss Sinclair, she must be frightfully unhappy not to be able to help crying in the street.

But then, when one came to think of it, where else could she have cried,—not in the school room where Aunt Margaret kept coming in, and not at lunch with the butler there. How frightful it was to have to cry in the street, and when the street was all so happy as to-day! It seemed to Marah dreadful that the very streets should be happy, and that the boy ahead of them should skip and dance and whistle and clap his stick joyously against the railings.

She broke from Miss Sinclair, and Miss Sinclair didn't even notice, and ran to the boy. "Don't make that happy noise," she said, "when there are so many unhappy people in the world."

"Aw, gowan," said the boy making a face at her.

"Gowan yourself," said Marah, who fancied the word, "but please, boy dear, there is a lady who is crying and we mustn't let her see how happy we are, you know, she might feel worse for that. Please don't, boy." She patted the boy's arm with her little gloved hand, and he said,

"Well, I don't care if I don't." And went on quite quietly.

Miss Sinclair was blowing her nose again. It was a long, thin, very white nose. When she had put her handkerchief in her little bag, she said to Marah, "Dear," she had never called her that before, "dear, you really mustn't swing your arms like that when you walk."

"Ah, gowan," said Marah, rubbing her best hat against Miss Sinclair's sharp pointed elbow.

VI

EVERYTHING seemed strange that last night, Marah did not know why. She and her father were up in the lumber room. She was to go home to-morrow. All the gold of the sunset was gone; there were no more shadows, yet everything was in shadow; everything was turned to purple in the strange, slow twilight of May. It had been a wonderful sunset. All the west had been a sea of gold, a silent, calm, pure sea of gold, and the gold had poured down through the western streets, through their narrow, deep channels, flooding the square, drenching the walls of its houses, and its arch, and its trees in their lovely spring leaf. The shadows had been beautiful, even the shadows of ugly things, as are always the long, soft, wet shadows of May sunsets. The people down in the square went through the shadows, from sun-touched space to sun-touched space, and their own shadows followed them or

led them and gave a troop of ghost people to the square.

Marah's father had brought in masses of purple lilacs and had got Bridget to smuggle them up to the lumber room without Aunt Margaret's seeing. A big broken bowl, that Marah had found behind the heap of old curtains, was full of them and stood on the dusty table, and Bridget's water pitcher was full of them, and the housemaid's too, that she had kindly offered, and there was a great heap of them that Marah just held in her arms.

The purple twilight and the odour of the lilacs belonged together, intensely. And the singing of the violin belonged with them, just in the same strange way. And the voice of the city belonged with them, and, somehow, the memory of the wind that had cried in Daphne's chimney. And it was all intensely sad. And yet one loved it so. Marah sat on the table, in the dust, by the bowl of lilacs, sitting Turkish fashion, holding the rest of the lilacs in her arms. Her father stood with his violin by the table. The twilight

lay on everything, purple, deep and soft and quiet, caressing like a touch.

It seemed to Marah that if her father would only play Daphne's song,— now, here, with the twilight and the lilacs and the city's voice, all the city's sounds together, for undertone, something that was just beyond her understanding, that was always just where she could not get to it, would draw near, and she might *know*.

The city's voice came in through the wide open windows. There was the distant whir of the cable cars, the rumble of the elevated railroad, and there were the sharp strokes of the car bells, sometimes a clattering wagon or cab or a motor that panted, passed through the street under the window. Always there came the long, trailed siren whistles from the river. And every sound seemed to belong with the purple dusk and the smell of the lilacs and one's need of the violin to tell one something.

She wanted to tell her father about Daphne's song, but somehow she could not. With him it was like that so often, that one wanted terribly

to say a thing and could not. It made her very lonely. The loneliness made her want to creep close to her father, there in the purple twilight. To-morrow she would be going home to Daphne, and away from him. She wouldn't see him again for another half year. Home would be wonderful, with spring come late there, apple blossoms not out yet, an ecstasy in the finding of the first violets. Daphne would be lovely, and they would go down to the swamp next morning to gather cowslips,—or to the woods to find wind flowers and anemone and hepatica, where the sun was warm and the little, new leaves threw such frail shadows.

It would be wonderful arriving all in the dark, with the morning to wake to, and a certain special happiness waiting for one in just the way the sunshine fell at its springtime angle, and more golden than other season's sunshine, across the nursery floor. She was so happy. And she was so sad. And everything of all the world was so mixed and strange.

"Father," she began, and stopped—

"What is it, little girl?"

"I — I don't know," she said; "will you never talk to me, father?"

He put his arm around her, as she sat on the table. "I cannot talk," he said.

She said, "You play it with your violin." She cuddled up against him. Suddenly a queer fancy came to her. It was that if only they were down in the streets, he and she, poor and ragged and hungry and tired and wandering, he could play things that would make all people understand. That would make all ways open to them, ways through the streets and the crowds, and ways through woods and fields. And perhaps Daphne would come to the violin's calling in the twilight.

Then her father began to play. It was a thing he never had played for her before. It began with a soft gathering in of shadows, as though the violin drew the purple darkness in, drew the folds of the night's skirts in, all softly, round them there, in the lumber room. Then, through the depth of purple shadow, her father began to sing, half sing and half say, all very

softly, words that seemed to come from the violin's music, or to go to it, sinking into it, Marah did not know which. It was very odd that he should half sing, half say, the words of a song, as Daphne had, that night when the winds cried in the chimney. And the words of the song made it all stranger —

*I sleep, but my heart waketh —
 It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying,
 Open to me, open to me.
 For my head is filled with dew
 And my locks with the dew of the night.
 I rose up to open to my beloved;
 And my hands dripped with myrrh,
 Upon the handle of the lock,
 I opened to my beloved;
 But my beloved had withdrawn away, and was gone;
 Whither is my beloved gone?
 Whither is my beloved turned aside?
 I have called upon the winds;
 I have sought through the wilderness;
 My soul faileth;*

*My soul faileth;
For my beloved is gone.*

It seemed to be so a part of Daphne's song, and it was so sad, as the violin sobbed it out in the room, with the voice of the city sobbing with it, and the gas jet flaring and whistling, and the patter of a mouse's little feet across the floor.

Marah's father was altogether the father one loved then, and being proud or not wouldn't have made any difference. He wasn't at all a grand person then, but just a lonely person, who played out sobbing things to mice and shadows and a little girl.

*I am come into my garden;
I have gathered my myrrh and my spices;
I have eaten my honeycomb;
I have drunk my wine with my white bread;
Thou whom my soul loveth, thou art gone from me.
Thou art gone from me out of my garden,
And without thee I have no life at all.
My soul faileth for thee,*

My soul faileth for my beloved.

*I am come down into my garden to the bed of spices,
To see if the vine flourish and the pomegranate bud
forth;*

There I await my beloved;

I await my beloved;

I await; and my soul faileth.

. . . It was so terribly sad. And her father's face was sad too, terribly, as he let his hand with the bow fall, and stood there, the violin still cuddled under his chin.

"It's like Daphne's song," Marah kept thinking. She wanted to tell him of Daphne's song, about one who ate one's bread with tears and lay down to sleep with sorrow, and about how things had to be as they had to be. But she could not tell him. She said, "Father, isn't it queer how sad things are when one is so very happy, really?"

He said, "You are happy, poor little Marah?"

1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were present at the meeting.

2. The second part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were absent from the meeting.

3. The third part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were present at the meeting.



PART III

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

3. The third part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

I

IN the forest house kitchen, when they broke into its refuge from the sudden storm, a most surprising sort of man, for one to have happened on there, was sitting on the bench by the great fire. Minchot, the young gamekeeper, in his corduroys, and the man it seemed so strange to find there, were smoking together on the settle in intimate silence, and the fire was roaring in the old stone oven, against the roar of the wind, and Granny Minchot was clumping about in her sabots and her white cap, making coffee and scolding the two of them comfortably, and any number of dogs were sleeping stretched out around on the red brick tiles. The oven door was open and the dark, low-ceiled old room was full of firelight, the blackbird in his osier cage at the window whistling to the light of the fire as though to sunlight. The smell of coffee was good in the room, with the

smell of the geraniums and mignonette from the window pots, and the smell of the burning logs. There was something quite beautiful in the sudden coming into it all from the rain and the wind and the dark of the forest.

The man on the bench got up and stood there, — tall and thin and shabby and immensely a gentleman,— apart, while Granny Minchot and young Minchot came forward, and the forest house dogs and the château dogs more or less amiably greeted one another.

Granny Minchot poured out her excitement.

“M’sieu’ l’ Comte, oh, M’sieu’ l’ Comte,— and it is the little Comtesse,— in all the storm! Oh, my poor little Madame! But they are drowned, the poor ones,— and so far from the château, too, — and such a tempest!”

“Bah,” said René, stamping the wet from his boots and giving his gun and cartridge box to the game keeper, “it will do us no harm.” He was impatient a little of her adoration. And, “How are you?” he said in English to the man by the fire, and went over and shook hands with

him. "I would present you to my wife. Marah, Mr. Renshaw is an American too, and a writer of books that you must have read, who chooses, — who knows why,— to live like this here in our forest."

"I know your books," said Marah, pulling off her wet gloves, and giving him a little brown hand; "I know them all, the English and the French. How very strange to meet you here like this!"

His books, that were lauded to the skies by those whose praise was most sought, were wonderful to her, not because of that, and not because they were really extremely well worth lauding, but just because they had seemed so wonderfully to have to do with her own little life. Just as wonderfully as the forest, that René had talked of to her, in her life's saddest, loneliest time, had seemed to have to do with it. It was all very wonderful and very strange to her,— all of it, the forest, and René's belonging to it, and bringing her to it, and now her coming in it on the writer of these books.

She had a fancy that for some reason it was strange to him too, to meet her here. It seemed to her that he was looking at her rather oddly. It could not be in any way because of her that his eyes had gone so sad. It seemed to her for a minute that some pain showed terribly in his face. He was a man of forty-five, perhaps, or older. She liked his face, the delicate cut of it, his rough beard, his being so sombrely dark, and then the unexpected bright darkness of his eyes.

"I am happy to meet you, madame," he said; "we have talked much in the forest house of the new little Comtesse, and I translated for these, my kind friends, columns from the American journals about the marriage, way off there. Our summer was full of thought of you. This storm is an event to us."

Marah laughed, and turned to Granny Minchot and said, in her pretty, scarcely foreign French, "I have wanted to come before to see you, Anne Marie, my husband and his sister have spoken often of you, but I am so new, you see, to all this life here, that learning its ways takes

much time and I leave many things undone.”

“M’mme l’ Comtesse is too good,—that she should think of Anne Marie!”

The old woman, in her cap and sabots, would have stood indefinitely just looking at the little, brown, bright girl, who was come from so far to be “*la dame de la famille*.” Anne Marie had served the “family” all her life, as her people had, all their lives, as long as any one knew; and her husband, the old head game keeper, had served the family, and so had his son and hers, and so the grandson did now, as all the good Minchots had, since there was any remembering. Granny Minchot was round and rosy and contented and comfortable, but there was something tragic, Marah felt, in that so intense gaze of hers. It made her think, desolately, of Bridget Quinn.

Young Minchot, of the generation that does not accept and love and serve quite as did the old,—perhaps not at all as did the old,—smiled, leniently, at the old woman and the little new lady, and looked past them over to Paul Renshawe

with an intimacy that allowed for amusement at most things. He said, "I place a chair for the Comtesse. Mémère, get thou the coffee hot. If Madame the Comtesse will sit here by the fire."

"I'm not really wet," said Marah, going to the chair he had drawn to the fire for her, "it doesn't get through one's shooting boots, or skirt, much. Only, we couldn't make any headway against the wind; it took us by the throat and struck our eyes, and we came to the firelight of your window here."

She took off her dripping, black felt hat and threw it down on the floor. She shook the wet out of her hair and looked apologetically up under its loosened tangle at Paul Renshaw, to meet again that odd pain in his eyes. She wondered if her mourning,—her dress that was black instead of the brown or green of shooting dress,—meant some memory of grief to him. She was sure it did. And she said to him very gently, "You love the forest, that you have chosen to live in it?"

"He has lived here for years and years," said René, coming over to the oven too and standing with his back to its glow and his hands behind him and all the dogs about him. "He has lived here so long that he has come to be part of the forest, like the pine trees down the Allée Noire, or the white birch tree by the basin."

Both he and Marah had spoken in French, and Granny Minchot, who had gone to the fire with them, forgetful of the coffee, broke into it. "Oh, but we would that thou didst belong to the forest and to us, little M'sieu' l' Comte, as he does. It is the hope of us in the forest that now we have M'me l' Comtesse here, things will be different, and she will keep thee here as we could not, and draw thee back to us, if ever any more thou goest away from us." She said to Marah, standing with her hands on her hips, thumbs forward, peasant fashion, and bending an anxious, eager, good old face down to her, where she sat by the fire, "M'me l' Comtesse will learn to love the forest."

"I loved it from the first," said Marah, "be-

fore I saw it, when first I heard of the Allée Noire and the Carrefour of the Grand Bassin and the Roads of the Four Winds."

She said it dreamily, the very names had such meaning for her. How they brought back poor little Daphne's stories to her and her childhood, that now, to her at eighteen, seemed so very long ago. It was all so strange, as all things of her life had been. It was less strange now to be here in the forest,—that she seemed always somehow to have known,—in its autumn, with the great black flights of crows across it, and the singing of the sea in the pines down the Allée Noire, than it had been to hear René talk of it, away far from it, in the house on Washington Square. She thought of Aunt Margaret's saying it was better so, that Daphne should be gone,—out of the world, like the going out of a light in vast darknesses,—talking of ruined lives and of the word sin, that she, Marah, never had been able to understand. She thought of her father, and shrank from the thought of him, because the more she loved him, the more she blamed him,

though she only dimly knew what there was to blame him for. Then she thought of the Frenchman, who had talked to her of the forest, that seemed so strangely to be more her home than the house from which Daphne was gone, or the house in which her father was left, kept apart from her, however near her, by some indefinable remaining of the darkness death had drawn between them, by some indefinable coming in between of the coldness of death. From the thought of it all came upon her, there in the forest house kitchen, a great wave of loneliness and strangeness. She put her hand out quickly, there where she sat by the fire, and caught at René's hand as he stood beside her.

He laughed down at her, lifting her hand up lightly as it clung to his, and caressing it amusedly and very tenderly. He smiled over her little brown head at Paul Renshawe, as if to say, "You know what I am,—devil take it all, who doesn't?—And here I am actually in love with this child, and charmed to stand here holding her hand!" He said to them all then, "There

never was one of us, of our own French, who loved the forest as this new comer to it does."

"You love it too, Valensonge," said Paul Renshaw, somehow as if he were giving a command, rather extraordinarily somehow, as if it mattered much to him that René should love the forest. He was all of fifteen years older than René, perhaps more, and he seemed to have a curious authority over him as he said, "You will not tire of the forest now again, Valensonge."

"Have you two known one another well?" asked Marah, still holding René's hand.

"I have talked more to Renshaw than to anyone else in the world," said René. He let go Marah's hand and took his cigarette case out of the pocket of his brown shooting jacket.

"You never told me," Marah said, rather wondering.

"I have told you little of anything as yet," he said, "but that you are a sweet child, little madame Marah. Give me a light, Renshaw. And what of that coffee, Anne Marie?"

Young Minchot had prepared it. He brought

it with the best china on a tray. "My grandmother adores," he said, "while I make coffee."

The old woman, all excuses, clattered off to get bread and butter, and her own confiture of raspberries, and Paul Renshawe and René dragged the big oak table up to the fire close to Marah's chair, where she could sit at goûter, still with her short leather-bound skirt turned back to dry in the warmth of the fire. René and Paul Renshawe pulled their chairs up. And Marah would have old Granny Minchot and the game keeper sit at the table too, that they might all have goûter together. She was starving! She would eat all the confiture of raspberries. "It's such fun," she said; and then she said to René, "But your sister is having tea all alone at the château!"

He shrugged his shoulders and said, "She is used to that." His shrugging of the shoulders always troubled Marah, it was so careless and indifferent. It was not like him, as she knew him, at all. It made her think vaguely of stories she had heard told of him in America. She

looked at him over the edge of Anne Marie's finest coffee cup when he shrugged his shoulders about his sister's being alone.

He certainly was a delightful looking person, her René, not only because he was quite what one calls handsome, his height, his carriage, the shape of his head, the Valensonge nose and the Valensonge chin, and his own brown eyes, that said so much more than ever he meant, but because of the warmth of life there was about him, the quite special intensity of it. He was twenty-seven. He was one of the men most sought after in Paris, Marah knew that, and he had been, perhaps he was still, the loved of many women. In America she had heard many stories, and in the little that they had been about in his world here, the few shootings they had been to, the few days in Paris, out of season, of course, she had seen many things. Intense, imaginative, emporté,—with it written down for him, from the first of it, that so very much, all along, he should ask the wrong things of life, the things it couldn't give, or that he shouldn't take,—the very qualities he

had that most might make him hurt people, most made him charming, and little Marah, who loved him, loved him for just that he was like that, and was not so afraid of his likeliness to be carried away, so to put it, by feeling things too much, as she was of that shrug of his shoulders, sometimes, that impression he could give, all suddenly and surprisingly, of being indifferent to all things, careless of them. The tragedy of his sister was so tragic a thing that Marah hated his shrug of the shoulders over its utter loneliness.

He had turned to the gamekeeper with some question, and it was the American who met Marah's eyes.

Quite suddenly then she realised that he, Paul Renshawe, knew all about loneliness.

She put her coffee cup down and said to him, "So *that* is why you choose to live here?"

He smiled at her across the table.

"And that's how you came to write, 'Pages for Nobody,' and 'La foule d'isolés'?"

"She is one who can appreciate your books,"

cried René, turning to them again, proud of her with a pride that especially touched her, and pleased that she should give pleasure to his friend, "they are the most wonderful books, I'm sure. Though I have not read the English, I know the French. And you, Marah, and Paul Renshawe must be great friends. He is a hermit, but he does come to the château sometimes. He is the only person Hélène will ever see. I don't know however it came about, but she's actually glad to see him. You will come often, now, won't you, Renshawe? And when I'm away you two can take walks together in the forest you both love, and you can talk of books together."

Granny Minchot joined in. "M'me l' Comtesse should read the wonderful poems he will not publish, that only I found, dusting in his room. About the Carrefour du Grand Bassin, that is the one I most love, M'me l' Comtesse, and though I have not the grand education of my son here, and of those of this day, yet never do I pass the basin, but I see down in the depths of it the gold key."

II

"I LIKE him most awfully," Marah said of Paul Renshawe to René's sister, one day when he had breakfasted with them at the château. She had been seeing a good deal of him. René had been much away. But she had had the forest. And Paul Renshawe seemed indeed, as old Grandmother Minchot had said, to be part of the forest.

She and Hélène were sitting together in the Watteau room, in that very long hour after "the five o'clock." René had gone to Paris for a few days again.

Marah in the lamplight was drawing processions and dances of little red and black devils, on a cover for a table in the Abbé's room. Her table and the lamp were close to the fire. Hélène sat in the bergère across the chimney, with the beautiful side of her face turned

toward Marah. Against the folds of the black lace mantilla,—that she always wore, thrown over her head and half drawn across her face,—the beautiful side of her face was so beautiful that she seemed like the queen of one's fairy tales:—“hair as black as the raven's wing, lips as red as one's heart's blood, skin as white as the snow.” Her hands lay together in her lap, the beautiful hand, and the hand that was wrapped around always with a black silk bandage.

“I like him most awfully,” said Marah.

“Do you indeed,” said H  l  ne, in her most unpleasant way.

“How amusing of you to say it like that,” said Marah, “as if I must necessarily mean something horrid. You interest me. You have a curious way of looking at things, as if there were only ugly reasons for everything. Now what reason, please, are you trying to give me for my liking Paul Renshawe?”

H  l  ne shrugged her shoulders, like Ren  , and did not answer.

"I have a reason," said Marah, bending over her devils.

"Without doubt," said Hélène.

"He's really quite old," said the little, almost new Comtesse.

"But there is no one else, apparently, about," said Hélène.

It was ugly of her, under the circumstances. René's being away, as much as he was, ought not to have mattered perhaps, but it did terribly, and Hélène knew it.

"I made you say that," said Marah, putting down her red pencil. "I wonder if it was detestable of me to make you say so detestable a thing." She put her elbows on her knees and her chin in the palms of her hands and sat looking away from her sister-in-law. They had been talking in English and she went on twisting it into her own American. "I 'drew' you," she said; "I wanted you to say a thing so hateful that we should have at least that ground to stand on. Why do you hate me, Hélène?"

The wind had fallen outside and it was very still

in the room, where Hélène and she already had sat together through such long hours, and where they would have to sit, like that, through long hours, all the years. Their silence was, it seemed to Marah, like a pane of glass between them, through which they saw one another very closely and clearly, never touching one another. The sounds in the room were part of the silence. There were the sounds of the fire and of the clock and of the autumn forest winds and the cawing of the crows about the grim old forest château. Marah had said, "Why do you hate me?" and sat not looking at the sister of René.

Suddenly Hélène moved. She threw the black lace back with a savage gesture and turned quite round in her chair, so that in the lamplight, full in the lamplight, Marah could see the scarred side of her face.

"Because I hate everyone," she said. "How I hate everyone."

Her beautiful hand, as she turned in the chair, had clutched the brocaded arm of it,—such a beautiful hand, weighted with rings. She seemed

suddenly real to Marah from having been as unreal as any other ghost of the château. But now there was real power to suffer in the clutch of her hand on the old red rose brocade and her voice was real with pain.

"Stand up," she said, "and come close and look at me. Look at me, and remember that I was beautiful. Most beautiful. And remember that all the world loved me. Then that day—the Bazaar, the flames, the hideous struggle,—” She let go the arm of the bergère and raised her beautiful hand and struck it savagely against the table edge. “Bah, if I could have died then,” she said.

Surely in all the years she had never spoken like that before. Surely after it she would have reached for her crutch and got up, with that dreadful effort it always was, and have left the room, to go anywhere, away.

But before there was time, Marah was kneeling by her on the rug, both hands in her lap.

“Hélène, Hélène, oh, won’t you not hate me? Oh, won’t you see how I could love you, and won’t

you let me, and won't you want me to, and won't you love me back again a little? Oh, Hélène, just a little! Hélène, Hélène, I so need you. All this life is so strange to me, and all life, always, everywhere, has been so strange to me! Why would you be my enemy, Hélène?"

"Because you look at me," Hélène said slowly, not responding to her touch, not even drawing away from her, just saying it with a sort of dreadful coldness and quiet, as if there were no use either in saying it or in not saying it. "Is not that reason enough for my hating you, that you should look at me? I lived here alone through the years and the years, and there was no one ever to look at me. Except one man, who himself was sad. And now you come, now René brings you here. And it is not only that now I have no right to be here, that now I should go away from this place that is his and yours; it is not because this house has been my hiding place, and the whole world outside seems full of glare and staring people;— it is that you look at me. It is that you are young and pretty, and

you can have love, and life, all that, and you look at me. You come here,—and every day, and all day, as it happens to us in our solitude together,—you look at me, who have been dead for years. I am thirty-two. I have been dead for ten years. This room here, where you sing your pretty Irish songs, and dance your pretty Irish dances in the sunshine, and draw your red and black devils, that amuse the Abbé, —this room has been a grave for ten years. A woman has been dead in it for ten years. And you come, happily, and look at her.”

“Hélène! Hélène!”

Now Hélène drew away from her.

“I was beautiful, and all the world loved me. But that was not it. I was beautiful and there was one who thought he loved me. And I too thought so. And I loved him. Whatever had happened to him, if any tragedy had come upon him, I should only have loved him the more. If any terrible, any hideous thing had come upon him, I should have loved him for it the more. But he,—it was my beauty that he loved. A

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sweep of flame, some falling,—I can't rem
And then I was a thing that had to live on
that he could not look upon. And how c
bear afterwards that anyone should look
me?"

"Hélène! Hélène!"

"And you come," went on Hélène, "eig
years old, and pretty, and with René, f
that he has been, what they all, all, all, a
our hideous world, yet loving you, and wi
life for yours, if you will but take it,—you
and look at me, at one who is dead. An
talk to me of how you 'like him awfully
one human being who in all these dead
years, has been kind to me."

Marah's caress had been quick and eager
Hélène's beautiful jewelled hand had put it
and so she just knelt there, leaning back, he
hands supporting her as she leaned so, o
hearth rug behind her, her head thrown bac
intense, little face uplifted.

"Hélène! Hélène!" she said.

"The one live being of all my world w

these dead years has been kind to me," Hélène said again.

What must it not have cost her to say it,—Hélène de Valensonge, proud, always, all her life, among proud people,—what must not the saying that have cost her. And she said it to Marah, — to Marah, who had thought that she, Hélène, only hated her, had been her enemy.

Always Marah had thought that Hélène hated her and was her enemy. And now Hélène had shown her, of her own will, things she would have shown to no one else, had given her a confidence and a trust.

Marah understood so utterly that she had no words for it. She knelt there, her hands on the rug behind her, leaning back against the light of the fire.

The autumn wind cried in the forest, round the château turrets and against the windows and through the draughty old room. It stirred the curtains at the windows and the tapestry opposite the Watteau panels, and lifted a little the rugs along the floor.

Hélène had given a confidence to her, and put a trust in her. And suddenly Marah dared give confidence and trust back. Suddenly it came to her that she could, and that *that* was what she had wanted, always from the first of it.

“Hélène, listen, Hélène. I do want to make you understand. It was *that* that I so wanted when I began to talk of it, that we two should understand. In all our life here together it would make all the difference if only we could. And here, in just this thing, about Paul Renshaw there is so much that, awfully, I want to tell of — and René is so much away,— and if you cared a little,—”

She did not know at all how she was going to tell it. The whole thing was so vague and strange to her. And yet the reason of everything seemed to be so closely in it. It would be speaking of very sacred things, sacred as the things Hélène had spoken of to her. It would be a gift, like the gift Hélène had given to her. And perhaps all of their life there together might be better for both of them afterwards.

She knelt in front of Hélène, still drawn back from her.

"If I tell you of the things that are quite dearest to me, will you care, Hélène? It is because I want you to care that I talk to you of Paul Renshawe. He so very, very strangely brings to me my life's most dear and most sad thing. Let me tell you, Hélène."

Hélène said, very quietly, looking away, "Tell me, Marah."

And Marah said, "It is because of my mother, of things she used to tell me, that I thought were only stories, but which were all of life and death to her, and nothing to me. I loved her, I worshipped her. And she was unhappy and I did not know. She told me of it, and I did not understand. They said she had done a great wrong. I did not care for what they said. But when she told me, in a lonely, wistful, desolate little way she had, of the unhappiness that was all the time slowly killing her, I did not understand. And, Hélène, listen." She knelt up very straight on the rug before the

older woman. "She told me of,—oh, no, no, I cannot understand. It is all so strange. Only, Hélène, she is dead, and I can never tell her how I loved her, and I can never give to her the sympathy I did not then know how to give. And there is some strange thing about this man here that makes me think of her, and of the stories that she told so tragically, and that I heard so carelessly. He makes me think of her until, almost, I cannot bear it. And those whom I should love,—they did not enough love her. And though I love them terribly, I can't forgive them that. And it is dreadful for me to think; I seem to have no thoughts but sad thoughts, nowhere to turn my thoughts to but to sad places. And I love René so. It seems to make one sad, however happy one is, to love so much. And very lonely. And, oh, won't you be a little glad to have me, Hélène? Hélène?"

Hélène was very tall, and all her life she had held her head very high. She sat very straight now in her chair. What she answered was intensely an answer to what Merah had asked of her,

though it might have seemed to be a thing quite different. She said, "René loves you. Never doubt that. However much he goes away from the forest and from you, no matter how much else he seems to you to have in his life, his man's life, never doubt his love for you. Oh, what do I not know of love? I know so much of it that I know it when it is given to another. And you have it given you. And however strange to you, from your other country and in your different way of seeing things, in your queer, crude young purity and ignorance, it may seem to you sometimes, don't doubt your having it. Let him go his man's way, and wait, and he comes back and it is worth waiting for. Oh, I know. Forgive me that I said an ugly thing."

She bent her head suddenly and kissed Marah.

III

MARAH and Paul Renshawe stopped in their walk by the basin of the gold key.

It was just as Daphne had told of it, there at the meeting of the four roads,—of the *Allee Noire*, and the road of the dawns, and the road of the sunsets, and the road to the edge; except that there were no little yew trees at the corners of the stone-set basin. There was even the clump of yellow fungus at the roots of the one white birch tree.

Marah and Paul Renshawe had been for a long walk through the forest in the wet, soft, sunny, gold and blue and purple, late autumn morning. The forest was quite bare, for there had been much wind, and the ways through it were open over the brown floor that was laid years deep in fallen leaves. Through the tree stems one looked far and far down distances that all led to mystery. The sunlight poured down into the forest, and

found the mists that night had left in it, and turned them all to silver and opal and mauve and pearl. The sky overhead was as blue as the blue bird of happiness, and down all the distances it was as utterly not to be described, as infinite, as any giving of dreams.

Marah knelt down in the little pine forest of moss, by the basin. She pulled her black gloves off and sank her bare hands deep into the moss and lifted them up and put them, wet from it, to her face.

Paul Renshawe stood looking down at her. He had his gun slung over his shoulder. They had come out with a couple of dogs, but he had not shot at anything. There had risen a pheasant or two, and they had heard the drum of a partridge, and had seen rabbits, and once a deer, down a wide open road between the forest's misty, sunlit walls, so beautiful a live thing, down the rutted, wet, shining road, that they just stood and looked at it, and let it go.

"I'm no good at it any more," Paul Renshawe had said: "I can't kill things. There was

someone that I once knew who loved all live things so; who loved even the crows that sweep their black flight across the forest."

Marah remembered how the shadow of them was on the pasture lot, that special day when she and Daphne went berrying.

Now, by the basin at the carrefour of the roads of the four winds, she asked him: "How did you know that there was a gold key in the basin?"

"Someone told me," he answered her.

"Was that someone ever with you in the forest?" she asked, afraid of asking, and yet so wanting to.

"No," he said.

"Did you both know what it was the key of?"

"Yes, of dreams."

She slipped down from her knees and sat in the moss. "Tell me 'things,'" she said.

He put the gun strap over his head and sat down in the moss too, his knees drawn up and the gun held against them in his two hands.

The dogs came up to lie down by him, and

watch him, both of them, with adoring eyes.

"Tell me about the roads," Marah said, "the four roads. First, there's the Allée Noire —"

"That's where the pines are," he said, "that the wind tells of the sea to. Do you know why it tells them of the sea?"

"Because," said Marah, "they beg of it news of their brothers, the masts of ships that sail the sea. Tell me what you hear when you listen there, alone with the wind and the pine trees."

"Sometimes," said Paul Renshawe, "it sings to the pine trees of the seas we know. Yesterday it was singing them a great triumphant song of storms that the ships win through, of the riding of great waves, foam and spray and the taste of salt, and those wild storm lights, you know, that, if one love the sea, one loves it most for. And sometimes it sings them quite beautiful dirges, that are not sad at all. Did ever you know about the Sea Beyond?"

"No," said Marah, "tell me."

He said it was called the Sea Beyond because it was beyond all the things of the world. He

said it was the sea for which had sailed all the ships that never came back. He said that it was a very calm sea, full all day of sunlight, and at night full of moonlight, and of stars. On starry nights, he said, the sea would be quite as full of stars as the sky. And always the sails of the ships hung motionless. The oars of the old galleys rested always. There was no need of anchors. The far away shore seemed perhaps to float on the sea or perhaps to hang in the air, one could not tell which it were. The ships never made port, nor tried to. They only lay as still as their reflections under them. And it was, all the picture of it, as beautiful as life and death are. Paul Renshawe said that on moonlight nights there would be a path of silver leading from each and every ship straight away to where jasper walls rose out of the sea, and steps of horn and of ivory mounted up from out of it; and there was a great terrace of cypress trees, and there waited, for each and every one of the men who had sailed the ships, some one thing, whatever it might be, for each man a quite differ-

ent thing, that would have been, if he had sought it, his heart's desire and the crown of his life. Only not one of them cared about that. There, where they were, in the Sea Beyond, they cared about nothing any more. That sea was beyond all memory and all desire. And it was as still as the beginning and the end of things. The winds could not come to it. It had no sound to give the winds that they might carry to the forest. For it was the sea beyond any remembering. The masts of the ships there had no messages to send to the pine trees.

"Oh, but it is a lonely, lonely dream," said Marah; "however did you come to know such lonely things?"

"And how came you to?" he said.

"And the road that goes out of the forest," she said, "I have never been that way. There are grain fields out there, aren't there? — that rise up alive and green, and glow to gold, and flame with poppies, and turn to bronze and brass and copper, and are reaped and sheaved? And isn't the road there fringed with poplar trees?"

[Faint, illegible handwritten notes]

ed cedars stood up out of the lawn, very in the moonlight. And the woods beyond in very dark lines, away, against the moon. For the cedar trees their shadows lay in dark, pools. And the shadows of the balustrade on the terrace, very dark, and very clearly finely wrought. The shadows of the peacocks were as motionless as the peacocks were, seemed strange that they should be black when the peacocks were so white. The might have been marble peacocks, there, on the white marble balustrade. on, high over the woods, seemed not to all, to be no traveller, but an idle thing, float, moveless, in the moveless lake which of the sky. Always it was like that dreamed close to the edge.

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And there's a white wall on the left of it? And the gate in it, and the avenue that leads straight to the dream house by the pool? Were you ever there, Paul Renshawe?"

"Neither have I ever taken that Road," said Paul Renshawe, "though I have often and often been in the dream house. I must have come to it always by another way. I know it only from over the edge. Do you see? I used to wake in the nights in a room in the dream house. It wasn't the side of the house by the pool, where there was the room that was all the colour of water, where the ebony table was, and those strange white flowers in the bowl. I went there only once, and then I could not stay, and I never could go back again. But on the other side there was a terrace with a marble balustrade, and always there was moonlight."

He went on to tell of it.

The white peacocks would come in the moonlight to the marble balustrade of the terrace. Beyond the terrace, below it, the lawn stretched away in the moonlight, far to woods again. The

clipped cedars stood up out of the lawn, very dark in the moonlight. And the woods beyond lay, in very dark lines, away, against the moon. Under the cedar trees their shadows lay in dark, deep pools. And the shadows of the balustrade lay upon the terrace, very dark, and very clearly and finely wrought. The shadows of the peacocks were as motionless as the peacocks were, and it seemed strange that they should be black shadows when the peacocks were so white. The peacocks might have been marble peacocks, carved there, on the white marble balustrade. The moon, high over the woods, seemed not to move at all, to be no traveller, but an idle thing, made to float, moveless, in the moveless lake which she made of the sky. Always it was like that when one dreamed close to the edge.

He sat hugging the gun against his knees and rocking back and forth a little, as poor old Bridget Quinn used to rock herself back and forth when she told stories,—poor little old Biddy, gone out of her nurse child's life in the curious, inevitable passing of time and things, with

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"Neither have I ever taken that Road," Paul Renshawe, "though I have often and been in the dream house. I must have come to it always by another way. I know it only from the edge. Do you see? I used to walk the nights in a room in the dream house. It wasn't the side of the house by the pool, there was the room that was all the colour of the water, where the ebony table was, and those still white flowers in the bowl. I went there once, and then I could not stay, and I never go back again. But on the other side there was a terrace with a marble balustrade, and as there was moonlight."

He went on to tell of it.

The white peacocks would come in the moonlight to the marble balustrade of the terrace. Beyond the terrace, below it, the lawn stretched away in the moonlight, far to woods again.

And cedars stood up out of the lawn, very in the moonlight. And the woods beyond in very dark lines, away, against the moon. From the cedar trees their shadows lay in dark, pools. And the shadows of the balustrade upon the terrace, very dark, and very clearly finely wrought. The shadows of the peacocks were as motionless as the peacocks were, it seemed strange that they should be black when the peacocks were so white. The peacocks might have been marble peacocks, and there, on the white marble balustrade. The moon, high over the woods, seemed not to be at all, to be no traveller, but an idle thing, to float, moveless, in the moveless lake which was made of the sky. Always it was like that one dreamed close to the edge.

He sat hugging the gun against his knees, rocking back and forth a little, as poor old Betty Quinn used to rock herself back and forth when she told stories,—poor little old Biddy, out of her nurse child's life in the curious, aimable passing of time and things, with



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Daphne and the swamp and the nursery and Miss Etticoat.

That was one of the thoughts that most of all Marah turned from.

"Tell me more," she said, "tell me of the road out of the west wind."

"Once upon a time," began the man, who did not look at all at Marah. . . .

He went on to tell her the odd little beginning of it. He told her how, "once upon a time," one winter day in Fifth Avenue, a little boy, Paul Renshawe, saw in a shop window a certain picture that was to have, curiously enough, much to do with the making of his life. He was so little a boy that the nurse held his hand as he walked, and dragged him by when he would have stopped before the shop window. The picture was of a dim summer forest, with a road lying straight across it, opened away and far away through blue and purple shadow to golden distances. Little Paul Renshawe hung back on his nurse's hand. He wanted to stop before the window and go into the picture, following the road wherever it led to. But he could

not tell the nurse that. There was no one in all his world to whom he could have spoken of that picture. The nurse dragged him by. He never saw the picture again, for the next time the nurse pleased to pass that way, it had been taken from the window. But he stayed in it all that day, and dreamed in the midst of it all that night, and afterwards, more and more, came to live in it,—in the story he told himself, that he made his days of, living all his small life by himself in “fairy lands forlorn; —” and in all his nights’ dreaming. It happened to him to be quite a homeless little boy in the several houses of his people, and to be loneliest in those rare minutes when by some chance it amused his beautiful mother to pet him.

And because he was forlorn, and very shy and sensitive to things, and intense about things, his dreams, or whatever one called them, came to be the part of his life that was most real to him, the influence that went most to the making of him what he was.

That one day, for a minute, he looked from the winter street, down the summer forest road,

and he went all day with a sense of it upon him, because he had nobody to play with; and because there was nobody to comfort him at night, alone in the dark, big nursery, he "made believe" about the road, till he took it into his dreams. In his dreams he followed the road of the picture. His feeling for it changed a little, as dreams change what one feels, making it the more intensely beautiful, the more intensely sad, with the sadness that is in all beautiful things, and the more intensely to be loved.

The dream, gone in the morning, left him a faint, sweet memory, like a fragrance, and a certainty, very vivid, that the road led *home*. He did not know in the least what he meant by *home*. It was just a feeling that *there* would be all the dim, far things he wanted; the undefined things he felt the want of at odd times, for odd reasons, — perhaps because the firelight glowed specially red in the brasses of the nursery hearth, or because the smell of the daffodils sold at the street corners filled the soft, sunny, misty spring morning; or because the sounding of the sea on the

rocks was sad in the dusk of summer nights;—all came to seem to him, wherever they were, to be surely just beyond there, where the road led to, over the edge of the dream. And he knew that some day or other, for some reason or other, he should find that road and have need to follow it.

Afterwards he thought that the picture must have been such an one as the men of Barbizon painted. Probably it was no great picture. That did not matter. Wandering down in it little Paul Renshawe could always softly put himself to sleep. The night he went farthest into it he found in the summer grass by the side of the road a little, white, frail flower, shaped like a star, that he never had seen before. It was the same, strange white flower that there was in the bowl on the ebony table in the house on the edge of the pool. But just as he knelt to pick it he woke. And so real the dream was that for minutes after waking it seemed to him he must be still holding the flower. That road led him to all the happiness of his small life, and as he grew to be a

bigger little boy, he still dwelt much in the places of it, for his world never was so happy to him but that he had need of another. And as it happened him all along in his life to see the failure of many things, he came to know better than most people how perhaps it is only dreams that do not fail.

And Paul Renshawe told Marah,— as he sat there with the gun across his knees, and as she played with the moss that was a pine forest a centimetre high, and with the acorn cups she found in it, sunk like little brown basins in it, full of rain,— how, when the one thing that meant his life to him, all his happiness and all his sorrow, all his glory and all his shame, became a thing that he must go away from, he went from it, and from all the world, away to seek the forest and the road that as a child he so vaguely had called the “road home.” He had found it. Perhaps it was indeed the road of the picture. Or perhaps it had just borne some resemblance to that road which fitted in with the seeing of his memory. Anyway, on that road there was the

forest house. And he had got permission easily enough—he had known the Valensonge people out in the world—to live in the house of old Granny Minchot, of the white cap and the sabots, and young Minchot, the gamekeeper, who could sit so comfortably over a pipe of an evening. And he had got permission, by some surprising graciousness of life, to dream his dreams in the room of the red brick tiles and the blue porcelain stove, and of the three windows to which the forest came up close. He said that while the someone he loved had lived in the world he had been almost happy in the forest, dreaming; and that when she was gone out of the world it seemed to him for a time that he could not live on there without her, so terrible had been the loneliness. He said that for a time it had seemed to him he could not bear the sympathy of the forest, that he must get away from the trees he loved, and the roads he had dreamed she took with him; that he could no more bear beautiful things and good things— And then he stopped short in his telling of it to Merah.

She said nothing, because there was so very much to say.

After a while he went on, and told her about the fourth road, the sunrise road.

He said that down that road one came to a place of sunshine upon grass and quiet graves, where the acacia was always in white bloom and the larks were always singing. One came—from one never knew where—across the grass between the quiet graves. They were very humble graves, with tin wreaths and garlands very poor indeed, and wooden crosses rudely cut with the “P. P. L.” or “P. P. E.” that asked one to pray for him, or for her, in the noon sunshine.

It was always noon, when one came to the corner by the sundial;—the shadow on the sundial showed that, and one would have felt it anyway. There was an inscription cut round the rim of the sundial. It was an inscription hard to make out, because the stone was so worn and so overgrown with lichen, but one knew quite well what it was. It was a very sad inscription. And yet it seemed only to give a greater intensity to the

happiness. Within the circle of the Roman figures of the hours it was cut deeply:

"They all wound;— the last kills."

Vines had climbed up about the low column of the sundial. Brown lizards slept upon its tablet. There were big gold butterflies about it, and little, wild, uncared-for flowers grew on the graves about it. And all the white blossoms of the acacia drifted slowly down in the golden air and lay upon the graves. Paul Renshawe said he did not know why it was that in that dream one was so happy in the place among the graves. Perhaps it was because the strange little white flowers grew among the graves.

After a while Marah said, "Shall we go on now?"

They went on, and did not talk any more of dreams.

They were often together in the many and the quite long times when René was away, but they never talked again of dreams, or put anything into words of what it all must have meant.

IV

MARAH never talked, never at all, of Daphne to Paul Renshawe. Whatever the strangeness of the thing was, it was a thing simply not to be put into words. Often she wished she could have talked to him. That she could not was not because of any hardness in him.

In those old days when as a child she had so terribly wanted to talk to her father, and could not, it had been because of a thing in him, a hardness about him, that, more and more as she grew older, she blamed him for. She could not talk to her father, for all she had loved him, not because, as it was with Paul Renshawe, there was too much understanding, and not because he, the man who played the violin for a little girl in a lumber room, could not have understood,—if it had been *that* she might have forgiven him,—but because he would not understand, or even admit of words that

might have led to understanding, that surely would have led to some help. Perhaps if he had never shown to her that one side of him that she loved so, perhaps if he had never let her know him except as,—it was absurd, and yet she did not know how else to put it than as she, the child, would have put it,—the drawing-room father, she might have been able to forgive him, and to pity him, and to save, out of the wreck of it all, something of her old child love of him. She might have thought he could not help it, and so have grieved for him. But as it was, because he might have understood, she could not forgive him. When she was a little girl, grown so much older that “people talked,”—people, the mothers of the dancing class children,—then she came to understand how one who ate one’s bread with tears and lay the nights through by the side of sorrow, had the more desperate need of little things, for that the one great thing of one’s life was gone. If her father,—the father who up in the lumber room so seemed to feel things,—had let Daphne keep her, the little Marah, for just

that half of the year they used to have, the half of the year that was so beautiful, whatever Aunt Margaret and the mothers of those dancing class children had said of it, then he might have left Daphne a reason to live on. And he might have left Marah with a reason to love him.

Perhaps Daphne had not wanted to live on, and was happier where she was. But Marah always remembered her laughing in a little cloud of yellow butterflies. Whatever had been tragic about her, she had belonged to sunshine. And where she was gone it seemed to Marah so utterly dark. They had taken Marah away from her. And she, Daphne, had been alone. And it was from loneliness that she, who so belonged to being loved, and to sunshine, had gone out into the dark.

They had taken Marah away. 'And when Daphne was dead, without her, away from her, there had been left in her heart no power to forgive. It was a tragedy that would bear no thinking of, no touching on ever, that there was no possible telling of.

And then had come René, who had talked to her of the forest. And even without that she would have loved him.

All that she had left because of him was left very dark behind her. She could not turn her thoughts back to it. It was all pain that way; that way her thoughts, like birds too far flown over troubled seas, found nowhere they might rest. And what she could not forgive her father for was that he had never let her talk to him, had never been willing to listen.

With Paul Renshawe it was not at all that he did not care to listen, it was that he did not need to listen, understanding anyway. He and she were content in their friendship, and asked no more of it than its silences.

It was to Hélène, oddly enough, under the circumstances — Marah quite realised the oddity of it — that she talked.

She and Hélène had much time alone together, for René was often away.

When Marah came in from her long times in the forest, her rides or her walks, at the hour of

the second breakfast, she would find less and less often that Hélène was breakfasting in her rooms, and their breakfasting together in the solemn, old stone dining-hall came to be, each time of it, more and more a pleasant thing.

Almost always in the late afternoon Hélène would come down to tea and they would have it, not formally any more in the Watteau room, which was of course one of the state rooms of the château, but perhaps in Hélène's rooms or Marah's, and Marah would say they played at visiting.

At dinner, stately and ceremonious for just the two of them, in the great dining-hall, Marah's was the first laugh that in very many years had sounded through the old stone spaces. The old maître d'hôtel and the young footmen, coming and going in and out of candle-lights and shadows, could not help looking at her. They served the better because she was there, laughing. Sometimes even Hélène would laugh too.

Then, after dinner, in the long time before the fire, perhaps Marah would read aloud, or more

often she talked. And always Hélène listened, in a way that made the talking very sweet.

Very often Marah talked of Daphne.

"There has been no one, ever, to whom I could talk of her."

"Marah, I think it is the thing I am most glad of in my life that you can talk to me of her."

"I am so very happy to have you, Hélène."

"And I to have you, little Marah."

She never told Hélène of those "things" of the forest. She had wanted at one time to talk to her of how strange all that was. But as she came more and more nearly to understand it, she could not have talked of it.

Once again Hélène spoke to her of Paul Renshawe.

It was one night when he had been dining with them at the château. After dinner Marah had played the clavecin for them in the Watteau room, singing a little.

When he left, she and Hélène had gone with him, because it was so lovely a night, out through

the splendid old entrance door, and across the court and over the draw-bridge, and a little way along the forest road. It was a moonlight night. He had not needed to light his lantern. He had gone his way along the road that was so white between the dark walls of the forest, and Hélène and Marah had turned back, their way, to the château.

As they walked, Hélène said of him, "He has kept true to a dream all his life. He has forsaken all realities for a dream. I do not understand it."

"It seems to me a little beautiful," said Marah.

"I do not understand it," said Hélène again, "and yet I try so hard to."

Her crutch tapped on the moonlit road. They went slowly because walking was difficult for her. She put her beautiful hand through Marah's arm and leaned on her more heavily than she need have done, as if she liked to.

"I try to understand," she said, "for now I see that it is beautiful. At one time I could not see that. It made me desperate that one who

might so easily have taken of real things would not take, refused to take, because of a dream. I had never seen the light on the mountain tops."

She said that very sadly, "I had never seen the light on the mountain tops."

They were following the little path across the lawn. On the edge of the lawn where the land dropped a little, the château roofs and towers swam in the moonlight, dark against it.

Presently Hélène spoke again. "I could not understand," she said, "and not understanding made me very lonely for a time. But now I have passed that time."

They went a little way on in silence, and then she said, "He gave her so great a love. He used to talk of her to me. Not while she lived. While she lived he had no need of anyone to talk to. While she lived just her being in the world, however far away she was from him, was all he needed. But when she was dead, when she was gone away out of the world, then he was lonely. He was very lonely then, and then for a little time he needed me."

She lifted her face against the folds of black lace, up to the moonlight.

"Then for a time," she said, "he did really need me. He used to tell me how he could not bear the forest without her. He used to tell me how without her he hated all things that were pure and clear, all that she had been taken from. I think it was I who saved to him his dream then. I think I helped him then to keep his ideal pure and clear and high."

She stopped, and Merah said, "If you had not helped him to keep the ideal high and clear, to take of no lesser thing than the dream that he had known, he would have gone from the forest, would he not, Hélène, and from his truth to her, his truth to the one who was dead?"

"I do not know that what I did was right," Hélène said; "it is all out of any understanding I can reach to. Only I felt then that it was better so. I cared. I cared so very much, that I felt things for him, and it seemed as if, because I felt so intensely, what I felt must be right. I did what I could in the way I felt to be the best

way for him. He is a poet and a dreamer. I think I saved for him his poetry and his dream. I do not understand, but I know,— because I care so much, I know,— that for him, what he is, there must be no forsaking of poetry and of the dream.”

V

WHEN René came back, after those days away, to the forest and to her, he was always glad to come. Marah knew that.

She would go over in the motor to meet his train when it arrived at the town on the edge of the forest. Usually it would be the five-thirty train, and in those autumn afternoons it would be quite dark. She would walk up and down the platform of the little forest station, waiting for him, and the chef de gare would come and talk to her;— of the shooting, and of the things that happened in the château village, and of things that happened in the town on the edge of the forest, and of René when he was a little boy.

The station master remembered that time when the little Comte, aged five, ran away "to go to the wars," and got as far as the station here, riding his piebald pony, "Miss" left behind somewhere.

“And it was of me myself he asked it, it is I who tell it, ‘Which way to the wars, Jacques Videau?’ he said, and he in his little velvet suit, as the old Madame used to dress him, with curls and a lace collar. And when we all here told him, ‘But there is no war anywhere now, little master,’ down he sat on the step there, just there where M’me l’ Comtesse is standing, and he cried.” How the old station chief laughed over it, remembering it.

Marah laughed too. She could see little René in the velvet suit, starting off heroically to battle where no battle was. It was like him somehow, even in this day, it seemed to her, still the preux chevalier of no causes.

Always the train was late.

“Can there have been an accident, do you think, Jacques Videau?” She was always quite sure at the end of five minutes that something must have happened.

And Jacques Videau would laugh at her, as he had laughed at the little René. “Perhaps the train has flown over the moon, M’me l’ Comtesse.

Perhaps M'sieu' l' Comte has ordered it to turn round and take him back to Paris."

Ten minutes late, and always she was imagining things, horrible things, broken bridges, collisions.

Fifteen minutes late; she would be walking very fast, up and down the platform, and Jacques Videau must assure and assure her that nothing ever happened on that road, and that there were signals and the telegraph.

Twenty minutes late, and he must go telephone to the next town on the line.

What should she do? What should she do if anything ever happened to René? Perhaps she had not been nice enough on Monday when he went away. Perhaps she had let him see how much she minded his going. Perhaps he had never got her answer to his Tuesday letter. Perhaps he never would know how she loved him. Never, never would she go into his rooms again, — if anything had happened. How could anyone ever bear, afterwards, — if anything happened, — the confusion of little things on the writing

table, the odds and ends about everywhere, the smoking things, the rows of boots in the cupboard.

Answer to the telephone; Jacques Videau coming back, laughing more than ever;—the train had left the next town.

And there was the light of it now down the track.

And then she was afraid that René might not have come, and how she watched the windows of every passing carriage. There was Louis, with all René's things. And there he was, René, coming to her along the platform from the other end of it, from a waggon ahead.

He was as glad to see her always as though he had been for months away. He was as glad to see her always as though his going away had been a matter of the cruelest necessity.

It was always so nice driving home, through the dark forest in the open car, the lights of the lamps travelling the road edges, the roots of the trees, the wet, rutted road, and with, all beyond that, the vast darkness of the forest, the great

silence of it, the mystery of it, closing them in alone together, as though from any world outside. She could nestle close to him, and he would let her hand stay in his, where it found his under the covers. And he would bend his tall head down and kiss her there beside him in the motor, and tell her how he loved her, over and over again.

It was nice when they came to the river, and crossing it on the bridge she made him promise her, always,—because Bridget Quinn had said that promises “held true” that were given over running water,—promise her always to love her, “beyond the night, across the day . . .”

The lights of the château shone out through the opening of the woods, down the long percé, and the great roofs and towers stood dark out of the sky's darkness, and it seemed to Marah then in those evenings that she and René had something, surely, which made the old castle, for all its grandeur, as much a “home” as any cottage with thatched roof.

Always when they went in, across the an-

cient drawbridge, that Nicasse, the porter, raised again behind them, it seemed to Marah that all confusing things, all tempting-away things of the world outside must be shut out, kept out by the old-time defences of the castle; and that inside of it she and René, with just their love for one another, could stand siege securely against all trouble of the world.

They were so happy for her, the days when he was with her in the forest. And there were many of those days. She knew afterwards that really it was rather a wonderful thing how much René had stayed there with her in the sad old place, so far from the bright world.

Their days were wonderfully happy together.

But always after a little he would go away again. He would say that he had to be in Paris about something, or that he was due at somebody's shooting, where he didn't care to take Marah. And he would say no more about it.

The visits she did make with him gave Marah the greatest pleasure. She loved the beautiful old houses of his country, the châteaux deep sunk in

forests, or lifted above some river's edge, or seen from very far across wide painted fields. And she loved his people, who were so brilliant and so courteous, who talked so wittily, and yet never left one out of it. How well they talked, back and forth across the charming dinner tables, never raising their soft voices. And how simply friendly they were out in the woods, the long hours through, tramping along the wet, sweet, autumn wood ways, waiting silently, silently in the heather, listening to the slightest forest sounds, not talking at all. She hated it that things must die, and covered her eyes and ears from the first sound of the beaters' nearing, and everybody laughed at her. Then tea would be so nice, when one came in to the big fires that leaped and roared in beautiful old carved chimneys, and to lamplight that shone always on beautiful things. And in the evening how well they could amuse one another, these people of René's country,—this one who sang so well, and this one who danced, and this one who recited. And Marah could sing and dance with the gayest of them.

It was the grand success she had, as Bridget Quinn would have said, that night at Talencourt, the place of Gigi de Talleray, René's favourite cousin, when she kicked off her slippers and picked up her skirts and danced them a jig that set them all quite wildly applauding. Her hair came down all in her eyes, and she sang them Irish songs through the lamplit, curly tangle of it. And really they had been awfully nice and funny about it. The Long Gallery at Talencourt was dim and shadowy, for all there were so many lamps in it, and the shadows danced with Marah, and the reflection of her little feet danced with her in the old, shining, parquet floor. There were great fireplaces at either end of the gallery, and the firelight was with the lamplight, and the shadows were with the two lights, and Marah felt herself to be a part of it all, — more far than were these people who had always belonged to it, and were used to it, and couldn't possibly know how wonderful it was.

She had been so glad to please them, those charming, friendly people, who were René's own

people, and she had been so glad to please René's cousin, Talleray.

Gigi de Talleray had really been most awfully pleased with her. He had made more "fuss" about her than about anybody else all her visit there, and he had managed to be alone with her whenever he could, and they had had the nicest times together.

And yet she had felt, somehow, that René hadn't liked it. He hadn't liked her dancing, or her singing the songs of Lir's swan children, and the Swordsman of Erin, and the Queen of the Lonesome Isle.

"You aren't pleased with me," she said, following him when he went so oddly off, quite by himself, to the billiard room; and he had not answered her.

No more had he liked Talleray's writing so often to her afterward.

"But I do think he's such fun," Merah had said, "I do like him so much, your cousin Talleray, and I am so glad he likes me. I do want your people to like me, René."

When Talleray motored all the way over to see her, René was annoyed about it. She and Talleray had such a nice time, too. She had taken him for a long walk in the forest, and to tea at the forest house, and Paul Renshawe had walked home all the way with them to the château, in the dark.

Hélène had not seemed at the time to like it. And yet she took Marah's part when René scolded.

"You don't understand," she said to René, "it's too bad that you don't." And she added, in a very odd way, "You must try to understand, René."

He had told Marah after that that she must not answer Talleray's letters. When again Talleray motored over he had not let her see him, and when Talleray really wanted her, more than anybody, he said, at his Scarlet Ball, that all the journals were full of for weeks, René wouldn't let her go. And yet he went himself. She did not at all understand.

"I really do look nice in scarlet," she said to Hélène, "and I've got such a ripping idea for a

scarlet dance, all wildly gay, you know, and yet somehow tragic, the way scarlet is, gay and tragic together. I do wish René had let me go. I want him to see that people like me, so he may come to be proud of me."

She and Hélène were out on the river terrace, the terrace that Henri IV. paced up and down with Gabrielle, and where the Valois kings used to come, it was said, escaping the court, to amuse themselves after a freer fancy than the court permitted, in the famous friendship of their House with the Seigneurs of Valensonge of those days.

The little river Vriez ran silently under the terrace, and beyond it the woods hung dim and purple against the sunset.

Hélène stood by the parapet leaning on her crutch, poor, beautiful Hélène, her dark furs wrapped close round her.

Marah sat on the grey old parapet of the terrace, swinging her little rough shod feet, her hands clasped round her knees.

"I did want to go to the Scarlet Ball," she said, "and if he knew how nice I should have

looked, really and truly, he would have been pleased, Hélène, and taken me, that people might have liked me."

"Marah," said Hélène, "little, little, little Marah, how can I make you understand? Oh, don't you see, it's not because of *that*, that he would be proud of you, not because of people's liking you, but because you don't care,—unless for pleasing him,—that they should. Don't you see, Marah, it is not ever because of a scarlet dress that he loves you, but because,—because of some forest dress you wear. I don't know how to say it, some rainbow thing, some cobweb thing, some cloak of dreams."

VI

ONE night René came home unexpectedly, not having sent word, and walking all the way to the château from the town on the edge of the forest. And it was just at the moment when Marah was being a very silly little girl.

She had dressed up just to amuse herself, all alone in her room. She had been alone nearly all day. Hélène had kept her rooms. There were days like that, sometimes, when she would not let even her maid come to the rooms in the West Gallery. Of those days she said to Marah, only afterwards, that she had had to be alone. She was always very gentle after days like that. And once she had even said, when she came with her crutch to the Watteau room, that it was so good, — si bon, to find Marah there.

This day Marah had been off alone for a long walk in the forest, and had stopped for goûter at the forest house. She and Paul Renshawe had

had their coffee together, and old Mémère Minchot had joined them. She had grown somewhat garrulous, had the good Anne Marie, in such sympathetic company. She had fairly broken loose in reminiscences,— of her life as a girl in the château, where she had been second nurserymaid; of master René, who was such a grand little master, who would have this, who would have that, and had it so always; of M'selle Hélène, the beauty, who even as a child ruled people by her beauty's power, whom "Miss" couldn't punish ever, whatever she had done, because her eyes were so deep and dark, like the water in the Étang St. Mesme, and their lashes were as water reeds, thick and dark and curved beautifully,— whom not even the old master, the devil to rule, as he had been, could manage; who had been the loved of all the world because she was so beautiful.

"Oh, the poor one, the poor one," said Granny Minchot, and let her knitting drop on her lap and sat for quite a moment still like that. Then she had gone on to talk of René. She told how he had been so handsome a boy that all the forest had

been proud of him, and how all Paris, when he was grown up, so soon had courted him. "All the ladies,—how they loved him,—the beautiful ladies," said Grandmother Minchot, thinking so to show him at his best to the new Comtesse, "all the ladies of the great world, all of them, they loved him. And there was one,—not of our France, but of a country where they speak most strangely and stupidly, and of that country's royalty, it is I who tell you, who so loved him that she wanted to give up her crown for him. Only he wouldn't have her. She was fat. Always he hated fat people. And also there was a lady of the half world,—how she was beautiful! She came to the forest. Bah,—the scenes she made!"

Paul Renshawe had looked past her, smiling at Marah, as if to say, what does all that matter, now it's over?

She had almost asked him things. She had almost said, "You knew him well. He talked much to you. He told me so, more than to anyone else," he said. Tell me of him, tell me of that part of his life, which is all so unknown to me, that I

had no place in." She had wanted to ask Paul Renshaw very many things about René, but she had not.

They had walked together afterwards in the forest, and had talked of nothing. They never talked much together. They were very intimate in their silences.

It had been a cold, clear day, with wonderful lights in the forest, and all the wet in the roads was shining under the lights. The deep sunk cart tracks and ruts of the wood ways held water that shone in golden lines, narrowing down the distances.

When she had gone home Hélène was not yet able to see her. She had gone up to her own rooms. They were the rooms of the South Tower that was called the Tour de Jean Sans Peur. The sitting-room rounded out with the rounding out of the tower, and had narrow, tall loophole windows, four of them, and was brick tiled and stone bound, like all the old château rooms, and full, as all the château rooms were, of beautiful old things. Merah loved all her things and the

room's rich sombreness, the dark panellings and tapestries, the dark Renaissance furnishing, the chimney, carved with the bearing away of Persephone from her Spring flowers; the worn old Eastern rugs, the candlelight and firelight upon it all.

When she came up to it that night she lit the seven-branched candles on the chimney and the two candles that there were on either side of the long, dim old mirror.

The mirror made her always think of the mirror at home in the attic, where the wasps possessed the autumn apples and the cobwebs made blue mists at the windows. This mirror too was as green as seawater, and gave one, like the mirror in the attic, a fancy of there being strange things reflected in it, things perhaps not there at all. Sometimes when she looked into it, it seemed strange to Marah that this mirror here in the tower room did not reflect the far-away old attic, the dresser with the glass knobs that shone like diamonds, the queer odds and ends of things showing dimly, like ghosts in the gloom, under the

dusty rafters. And sometimes she had a queer little notion that what this mirror did show of the beautiful, rich, old room behind it, was just what the mirror in the attic of the wasps would have shown her, if ever she had dared to go near it. Often she remembered her fear of that old mirror, and she wondered if really it had held a prophecy of what her life was to be, and if in that prophecy there had been anything that she need be afraid of.

This night she was afraid of everything a little, without reason.

She lighted the two candles on either side of the mirror, and out of the shadows behind her it reflected the shining, dark parquet, the carved doors of the press of the time of the first François, the dim, old blurred yellows and blues and greens of the story in the half-faded tapestry.

And against that background, when René came and found her so, stood the little Marah, as she had "dressed up" in tatters and rags, barefooted and with tumbled hair. She stood on tiptoe, with her head tossed back, and her hands clasped be-

sty rafters. And sometimes she had a queer little notion that what this mirror did show of the beautiful, rich, old room behind it, was just what the mirror in the attic of the wasps would have shown her, if ever she had dared to go near it. Often she remembered her fear of that old mirror, and she wondered if really it had held a prophecy of what her life was to be, and if in that prophecy there had been anything that she need be afraid of.

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And against that background, when René came and found her so, stood the Little Marah. As she had "dressed up" in tatters and rags, barefooted and with tumbled hair. She stood on tiptoe with her head tossed back, and her hands clasped be-



hind her, and René, opening the door from the Salle des Gardes, and swinging back the tapestry, came on her so, unheard. He was so amused that he stood on the top of the steps that led down to her room from the great stone hall, just looking at her. He thought she would dance one of her wild little dances, or sing one of her wild little songs, and he stood to see. But that was not what she did.

She had been dancing before herself in the mirror, and she had been singing all to herself. But now that mood was gone, and what she did was part of the old time lonely mood, that the little girl in the wasp's attic had known to be of purple and gold.

She stood with her hands behind her there before the mirror.

"Marah," she said to the Marah that looked back at her from the old glass, "you are happy. You are happy. Do you hear? The great house of many rooms and corridors saddens you, when it is empty for you, without him. But don't think of that. The forest weeps and wails in wind and

rain for him, or seems to grow all hard and cold without him. But don't think of that. You are happy, Marah, because he does love you, yes, he does! Perhaps he did love all those others that Mémère Minchot told you of, but he loves you best and differently. He goes away, but he comes back to you. He has his man's life, out away from you in the world. You find it hard to understand that. And it is of no use trying. But René loves you truly, René does love you. And you are happy, Marah. Don't try to understand things, for all life is strange beyond you and wider than your understanding. Just know that you are happy, Marah."

Then in her queer, ragged dress, like a little beggar girl, standing there, she bent forward and brought her hands from where they were clasped behind her, and held them out as if to someone,—

"The beams of our house are of cedar, and our rafters are of fir.

'Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south;

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*Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may
flow out.*

Let my beloved come into his garden." . . .

She covered her eyes with her little, brown, childish hands, and she never knew how René had seen her, so, like that, the silly little Merah.

For he drew back quite silently from the tapestry door. And when he came afterwards, saying nothing of that first coming there, she was very, very happy, for he was "dearer" even than usual.

VII

It was one day when she was feeling a little dreary that Paul Renshawe told her how H       had been his friend. She knew he told her because he wanted it that she, Marah, should let H       be her friend too, if ever she had need.

He said that once for a time it had seemed to him that there was no help anywhere, no escape anywhere, from grief and loneliness, unless it were in some confusion of crowds and lights and music and laughter, some filling of dream places with fever things, and the delirium that at least is a forgetting. He said he would have gone away from the forest and away from all his life's ideal, but for things H       had said to him. He told Marah that he did not know at all why she had troubled to say things to him, or however she had come to know at all of the things she said. In her brilliant, hard, cold life at first, of that world which is nothing but worldly, and in her with-

drawn, walled about, solitary life afterwards, how could she ever have come to know of such things as she had told him?

He stopped then in telling Marah, pulling at his pipe and wondering over it.

Marah could easily enough have told him. She did not say it, but she could have said, "One comes to know anything, everything,—even the things that kill one, the things that take one's life happiness from one;—all, everything, one comes to know, if only one love enough." She could have said that, but she did not say it. She only waited.

He went on telling her. Hélène had said to him that it was happiness just to have had a dream, an ideal, to have known at all of things beyond most people's wanting, beyond most people's knowledge even,—and that to have had that wanting and that knowledge was to have been given a great trust. She, Hélène, had said, that the most divine thing of life, quite, oh quite the most divine thing, was to have seen the light on the mountain tops. And she had said that once having had sight of it, one must live all one's life

in the pure clearness of it. She had said that one must live one's life in places high and clear in witness of the light which one had seen.

"In witness of the light," he repeated, half to himself and half to Marah. He swung his long step slowly beside her as they walked in the forest, and said all this half to her and half to himself, as it used to be with Daphne's telling her the "things." Having once seen the light on the mountain tops one must keep the clear shining of it always in one's heart. It was Hélène who had said that to him, he told Marah.

Marah knew that in saying that to him Hélène had been, even though she did not know it, herself having sight of the light on the mountain tops. And now Paul Renshawe said to Marah that he told her this in case ever it should a little help her to know it, as her life went on.

VIII

ALWAYS on Saturday nights the Abbé came to the château, arriving about nine o'clock, to hold Mass next morning in the chapel. They sent the motor over for him to the town on the edge of the forest, and he would come in, bringing the cool freshness and damp of the night a little with him. He was a big, old, blond peasant, with the kindest, jolliest face in the world, and the very shabbiest soutane, and the most simple delight in the luxury which his one night of the week at the château gave him. It was plain to see how he loved the beautiful, old soft coloured room where Marah and Hélène received him. They knew, amusedly and very kindly, how it pleased him that Marah should call the famous "fauteuil du Roy Galant," in a little jest, "le fauteuil de Monsieur l'Abbé," and insist always that he should sit in it to sip the glass of cognac that was so great a treat to him. Hélène, in some beautiful, always sombre,

dress, with the black lace mantilla drawn half about her face, would be stately and gracious always.

It seemed odd to Marah that she should be so the great lady, condescending, kind to the son of the good farmer who supplied the château butter, and then, so few hours afterwards, be his suppliant, kneeling before him, imploring forgiveness through him, for her very sin of coldness and disdain.

Stately Hélène was kind to him, and he gave her great tribute of respect. But it was the new Comtesse, who shocked him a dozen times in that hour there, who actually delighted to shock him, and laughed and clapped her little brown hands when some more than usually mischievous speech of hers left him speechless, the little new Comtesse Marah, a stranger and half pagan, whom he most dearly loved.

She had all beliefs and no belief; he was afraid of her and afraid for her. She teased him and petted him. And she was such a child, the eighteen-year-old new Comtesse.

At ten o'clock, when the table of sweet biscuits and cordials was brought in, how like a child she was, feeding the house dogs and sipping syrup of raspberry through a straw. When she lighted his candle in the silver sconce for him and gave it to him and said good-night, grave suddenly because the lamps had been put out and the shadows were thick and strange down the haunted old corridors, he wanted to do something for her more than just pray the saints for her.

In the morning the château servants, the farm and stable people, the forest people, the game keepers and the foresters and their families, came all of them to the chapel. They entered it by the outside door on the left, in the entrance court that one came to across the drawbridge. They had their places, young Minchot and Granny Minchot and all the rest of them, in the lower part of the chapel, down before the altar, close behind the Abbé in his scarlet and lace, and the head gardener's boy, little Gustave, who served him.

The family came into the balcony above, opposite the altar. They came in by the tapestry

door from the Salle des Gardes. First would come Marah, very grave indeed, sympathetic to it all because it was beautiful and strange and sad, somehow; and also because of a little old woman in a green shawl and a whole blessed, "trapsin'" company of nursery saints. Then would come Hélène, in her dark dress, with her many veils, very stiff and still, bending her head courteously to the God of the good Abbé. Then usually would come René, returned to the château at some weird hour of the night or the morning, amiably bored, apt to yawn and wink naughtily at Marah, but with much kindly feeling nevertheless for the Abbé, who had taught him Latin, and for the good saints, and for God and the Christ and Our Lady, and for those most beautiful old stained windows over the altar. Marah, who loved the faith because of 'an old Irish nurse, and Hélène, who could not forgive God, and René, who troubled not at all about any of it, looked down from the balcony upon their humble people and upon the beautiful old altar, and upon the Abbé in scarlet and lace, and Gustave,

the head gardener's boy, kneeling behind him; and to Marah it all seemed very lovable and a little sad somehow.

Always after Mass, René would go out with his gun and a dog or two, and Marah usually went with him. They would take a flask and a packet of sandwiches, perhaps, and stay out all day in the forest.

Marah loved their solitude like that, and the silence they kept. She loved the wet, misty, shining roads, and the grass paths, and the open distances, the drawing in close of the forest in its deep, dark places, and the sudden coming out from it to wide, gold lighted fields.

She loved the waiting,—if they had sent beaters out,—in such tense silence that there would come to them, in the fern and the heather, the very slightest of the forest sounds. She loved the forest so,—all the sounds and sights and smells, every touch and taste of it,—that it seemed to her as if her love for it must keep her close to René, must keep René close to her,—René, to whom it all belonged, and who must himself so wholly belong to it. She could not understand

his way of loving it. He knew it so well, he seemed to have thought for the care of every tree, and the clearing of every path, and for the preserving, till his pleasure should take it, of every little wild life in it. He would work as hard as any of the woodmen in the forest. And yet he never seemed to dream in it.

“René, René, see how beautiful that shaft of sunlight is where it strikes across the pines there!”

“The pines are getting too thick there. We’ll have to clear them out a little. I wonder what Joseph Longsort can be thinking of. I must come down here to-morrow with him.”

He did not know at all, as Paul Renshawe did, what the forest made her feel, what it meant to her. Sometimes just his not understanding, made her very lonely there, close with him. But when they went home in the early autumn twilight, he would hold her hand as they followed the woodways, and sometimes he would stop in the road to ask, taking her little sharp chin in his hand, “Are you happy, little Madame Marah?”

IX

It was not in any way Marah's fault that all the "bande" from Marlay-le-Vieux should have motored over that day to see her. She had not ever invited them. She wouldn't have dreamed of inviting them. It would have seemed to her cruel to Hélène to bring to the château such a crowd of beautiful people.

Of course it had been Talleray's idea. He had surely suggested it to all the guests of the Ségursens there are Marlay-le-Vieux.

They came, motor load after motor load of them, arriving all in time for noon breakfast.

There was of course Eugène de Ségursens and the little Lucille he had so lately married, and of course there was Mimi d'Escherville,— whose possession (even Marah, so far out of it all, had heard that) he yet was, for all his marriage. There was the beautiful American, Mrs. Victor Carrage; and there was poor little Alice de Gon-

port, with her fascinating husband, and there was poor little Charley de Viz-Correz, with his fascinating wife,—all of them so alike, and yet so confusing in their variously assorted unhappinesses. There was Lilli Farémont, not especially young, but so awfully droll, and there were two or three odd men, all of that sort, smart and great fun, and of course Gigi de Talleray. They burst upon the château's stern old silence with simply a storm of shouting and laughter, wraps flung this way, flung that way, a gay litter everywhere in the great, dark hall, orders to servants, demands for this, demands for that, calling and laughter, tap of high heels.

They swept down upon the Watteau room.

Marah ran to meet them, not knowing, between her pleasure at seeing them and her trouble that they should have come upon Hélène's years' long solitude,—what to do.

She never troubled about René, not dreaming that he'd mind it. He must be as glad to see them, his own people, of his own world, she would have thought, if she had thought at all about it,

as she was, who was yet almost a stranger to them. She thought then only of Hélène, who so long had kept herself hidden from just such people.

Now Hélène had no time to escape them. She came to meet them too, quite easily, as if it were not the dreadful effort that Marah knew it was for her to move, with her crutch, where they might see, and to speak with the black lace veil drawn very closely about her face. She held the black lace close at her throat with her beautiful hand, and she kept her other hand hidden in the folds of her dress, and so had no touch for her guests. Yet her greeting of them was charming, somehow. No one would have thought of the years it had been that she had hidden from all people like them. She might have been having part in everything of their lives all along. They might have been at the château only yesterday. She put Marah,—little new mistress of the château,—quickly in the first place of it, and yet it was she, Hélène, who saved it all from awkwardness. She made it seem not ungracious at all that almost at

once she should leave them. She left them as if that were a thing they need none of them give any thought to.

There was nothing Marah could do about it. She would have left her guests to follow H  l  ne, but she knew she could not. She wanted to run after H  l  ne and beg her, "Oh, won't you not care? Won't you just know that you are lovelier than any of them, and that they,—they are so much nicer than they seem?" But of course she could not, without making it all seem worse even than it was.

She was glad to see the uninvited guests, too, they amused her, and so did their unannounced coming.

Somebody said it was an invasion, the descent of the barbarians, and somebody said it was a landing on a cannibal island.

"Look at René," they all said, "how angry he is." And they all began teasing him.

Marah had not taken it in till then how displeased René was. That he was displeased made her a little angry. There was no reason why he

should be so, unless it were because of Hélène, and Hélène herself had not minded.

She had especially troubled to show Marah that she did not mind, coming to her before she left them all, to say, "Amuse thyself well, little Marah."

There was no reason why René should be cross as he was. Somehow or other Marah knew that he was cross because of Talleray.

Talleray was just amused by it. Everybody indeed was amused by it. They called him absurd names, gaoler and Bluebeard, and said he kept Marah a prisoner, and that they would help her to escape. They took possession of the château. They were in such humour that Marah almost forgot René's being annoyed by it all, and really had great fun with them.

She and Talleray raided the kitchens and stole all the chef's possessions, and made a picnic out on the terrace,—because the day was beautifully soft,—such a fine picnic that nobody wanted any breakfast after it, and instead afterwards they played games all over the château, through the

stone halls and corridors, and up and down the many little dark, winding stairways, and upon the great state stairs. There was a game of Marah's invention that especially pleased them, called Kelpie, with all downstairs for the Kelpie's water country, and all upstairs for the Sidhe-folk's country, and the necessity of raiding each other's domains, with much strategy and stealthiness and hiding. There was no point whatever in the game, and no way, on one side or the other, of ever possibly winning it, but it amused everybody immensely much, especially the hiding. Lots of people hid so successfully that there was no finding them when breakfast was wanted, some two hours late.

Marah and Talleray turned up in time for it, very dusty and cobwebby from a climb to the top of the Tower of Jean Without Fear, but Mimi and Eugène weren't heard of till it was time for tea and a hurrying off of the motor people.

After breakfast Marah ran up to Hélène's door for a minute.

"May I come in, Hélène?"

"No," said Hélène's voice from the other side of the door. "Come afterwards when they are gone. Are you amused, all of you?"

"Oh, yes, it's such fun. I miss you all the time, Hélène."

"Run along, child, and come tell me afterwards."

Some of them played bridge in the afternoon, and some of them played tennis. It was warm enough for that.

Marah took some of them, Talleray and some of them,—and René went too,—to the stables and the dairy and the potager and the château farm.

The world was all bare and brown and wet in the autumn afternoon; and mauve too, with a soft mauve haze upon things, that deepened farther and farther away into purple, or that lightened into opal and mother-of-pearl.

Marah was very fond of the farm buildings, old and picturesque, low and of shaggy roof and gables, gathered about the basse-cour, to which one came through an old stone archway, and

where the white ducks and geese possessed the little green pond, and the white chickens busied themselves with affairs of their own, and one smelt the cows, and heard the horses stamping. It gave her pleasure to show it all to Talleray. She and he chased the geese until the white feathers flew and everybody laughed,—except René.

It must be something very serious that so annoyed René, something more serious than she knew. She began really to worry about it.

In the potager, when they were looking at the lettuces under glass globes, and the big red and purple cabbages that yet braved the autumn, she tried to talk to René, but he did not seem to want her to. And that worried her; she so little understood it. To be angry, furious, was a thing she quite understood, but to be just displeased like that seemed to her extraordinary. She hoped he would tell her afterwards what the matter had been, but she was afraid he would not. When she tried to talk to him he had that look she was afraid of, and the shrug of his shoulders that always made her feel how much, how terribly

much, there was of him that she did not in the least know. It made her feel that she never could know him. It made her feel him to be indeed of a very, very far-away country, with spaces greater than of seas between them. She tried to walk with him and not with Talleray, as they went home from the kitchen garden, by the allée of the tilleuls. It was quite dark and shadowy there, the trees overhead enlaced so, all dense, bare as they were. She thought how happy it would be to walk really close to René, and perhaps have him hold her hand. But he was very odd about it all. It was the more odd, she thought, because Gigi de Talleray was not only his own cousin, but his great friend too, of the same particular little "crowd." She had heard,—even in America in those tales people had told about René,—of their many lively doings together. It seemed to her most unfair of René to be so odd with his friend now.

Talleray seemed no more amused, but indeed rather troubled, she thought. He also especially tried to talk to René.

René was very polite. There was no reason really why his way of answering Talleray's questions and comments should seem so rude.

They rather hurried down the linden tree allée.

It was a relief to be with the crowd again at tea. They set the gramophone going and were very jolly. Mimi and Eugène appeared and everybody teased them. There were big fires in all the rooms and everyone carried one's tea off anywhere. It was all very nice and cosey.

But Marah was very unhappy about René.

When it was time for the Marlay-le-Vieux people to go home, Talleray got Marah a little apart from the rest, as they were getting into their wraps in the hall, and seemed to have things he wanted to say to her. But René called her quite sharply to come and help Mrs. Carrage fasten her veil.

She noticed that when Talleray put his hand out to say good-bye to René, René did not take it,—perhaps it just happened so. She thought that when they were left alone René would tell her what the trouble had been. But he did not.

He went at once to his rooms, just saying he was very busy, and she, somewhat drearily, went to find Hélène.

X

RENÉ went away next morning without having talked at all of whatever it was that had been so wrong.

Marah tried to make him tell her.

Hélène had not come down last night to dinner, and Marah and René, dining at opposite ends of the long table, the silver and glass and fruit and flowers between them, and the men servants there, talked politely in a way that was quite dreadful to Marah. Afterwards he would not wait to have coffee with her in the Watteau room. He said he was very busy, had letters to write, and must be off to Paris early in the morning.

That morning was the loneliest perhaps she had ever known, in her not yet nineteen years; never had she felt so alone as when she stood with René at the entrance door in the cold, grey, early light.

She had wanted to go to the train with him, and

he had said he'd rather she did not. He said there was something he wanted the chauffeur to do in the town on the edge of the forest, and that her coming back would complicate matters. He would not meet her eyes at all.

"What is it?" she had begged him, "why are you angry, René?"

He had said, "Tell Louis not to forget the gun case. And be sure that letter gets to young Minchot. No, give it to me, I'll leave it myself as we pass. Well, good-bye, till soon, then, perhaps Thursday."

He had gone away like that. And it was Saturday,—and not yet nine o'clock of Saturday morning. There would be all the rest of Saturday, and then four whole days, and the longest part of another day, before he would come back. If only he had told her what the matter was. She had watched the motor swing out across the court and under the great arch of the draw-bridge, to the road in the dim blue woods. Never before had René's country seemed to her to be such a very, very far-away country.

In the loneliness it was somehow not Hélène,—Hélène who would have understood,—that she wanted. Just as in certain moments of her childish lonelinesses it had been especially not Daphne, who would have understood, that she had wanted, not Daphne just because of that,—that she would have so understood,—but Bridget Quinn, who loved all uncomprehendingly, so now she wanted somebody like Granny Minchot, who would look at her quite stupidly and adoringly and whose care would be of things like the fire and one's coffee. So instead of turning back when René was gone, to the big halls and rooms, or going to find Hélène, who would have been very sweet, asking no questions, but yet knowing, she went down through the forest by the short path through the beeches that was called the Route Tournante, past the Roches qui Pleurent, and across the little river by the old stone bridge of three arches, into the broad road that in all the dreams of Daphne and of Paul Renshawe had been called the road to the edge, and along that, turning away from "the uttermost purple rim," all grey in that grey morn-

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ing, to the house of good, plump, old Granny Minchot.

Half way there she met Paul Renshawe.

He said he had been coming to the château to fetch her. He was very troubled about poor old Anne Marie, he said. She seemed, he thought, quite unlike herself, almost ill. She was such a fine, strong old woman; in all the years he had lived in the forest house he had never known her to be tired or to fret. But last night he had found her crying when she was stirring the croute-au-pot, and she would not tell him why. And this morning she had been crying again, insisting that it was of no matter, that he must not trouble, that it was nothing, she had no ill, only she was very old, indeed he must not trouble. Young Minchot, he said, was away for a day or two's work at some distance in the forest. And he really had felt a great responsibility for the old woman. He hadn't seemed to be able to do anything for her. So he had come to fetch Marah. He said she could do more than anyone else could for Anne Marie, because the poor old thing did

worship her so. She had always worshipped the "family," and Marah, the new Comtesse, had come to be more to her than anyone else of it.

"You don't realise at all what you mean to her," he said, "when you have asked her to sit with you at the table and have coffee with you, and she sits there looking at you."

Marah in her desolate mood said, "I'm awfully glad if she cares about me. Poor old thing, I'm so awfully glad that she cares about me."

The way she said it must have told him what she did not at all mean to tell, that she felt, for the moment, as if nobody else cared.

And it was because of that, she was sure, afterwards, that he told her, as they walked, a certain story. It was the end of a story that once, long ago, one day at home in the library, Daphne,—smoking her funny little cigarettes, with all the sunset light behind her, and the blue smoke like the frailness of her hands and the deep shadows round her eyes,—had begun to tell her. It was strange that Paul Renshawe should finish the

story for her. And it was strange how much meaning there was in the story: — she knew afterwards, but only long afterwards, when she came to understand.

“There was a prince,” said Paul Renshawe, “who loved the princess he had brought from her very, very far-away country into his.”

“All princesses seem to belong to such frightfully, oh, such desolately far-away countries,” said Marah, walking, with rather a tired step, beside him.

“Yes,” said Paul Renshawe, “everybody is always all frightfully, and all desolately, from everybody so far apart. However, the prince loved her.”

“Are you quite sure of that?” asked Marah.

Paul Renshawe puffed his pipe comfortably as they walked together.

“Quite sure of it,” he said, “and I’ll tell you why he loved her. He loved her because of the lack of knowledge she had. Do you see, Marah? He loved her because she did not know the things he knew.”

"What were the things he knew?" asked Marah.

"Things of too bright, too hot, too perfumed rooms," said Paul Renshawe.

"He had nothing to do with woods and forests?" asked Marah.

"You see," said Paul Renshawe, "he had made for himself a country, he had gone away into a strange country of his own making. It was a country where the forest was forgotten. Don't you know how in stories there were people who wandered away, whom perhaps your Bridget's fairies had 'taken,' and who forgot all the things of their right, their real abiding?"

"The forest was forgotten, in that country he made for himself?" asked Marah.

"Yes, the forest was more or less forgotten."

"Tell me more that the prince knew," said Marah. "Did he know about songs and dancing?"

"He knew of princesses who danced on the blades of knives and sang songs that were most sad when most they were laughing songs."

"And those were the things he loved the princess for her *not* knowing?"

"He loved her," said Paul Renshawe, "because her feet knew only ways of moss and flowers, and her songs had been taught her by birds."

"Whip-poor-wills and bobolinks," said Marah; "did he know that she knew that?"

"He felt it about her," said Paul Renshawe, "that she knew those things. Perhaps he saw it in her eyes that she had looked not to the lights of crowded rooms and jewels, but to sunlight and stars."

"But perhaps she had seen only will-o'-the-wisps," said Marah, "and she had thought they were stars."

"Never mind that," said Paul Renshawe, "poor little Marah. It's the people who chase will-o'-the-wisps, who get nearest to stars."

"Were not the other princesses more beautiful?" said Marah.

Paul Renshawe said, "But they didn't have a cobweb cloak."

"Did he care about the cobweb cloak?"

"That was what he cared most about in the world," said Paul Renshawe; "and, Marah, I'll tell you something. If ever there's a princess who has a cobweb cloak, she must be careful to stay in the places of moss and grass and soft leaves, and dew, and clear raindrops, and unstained frost, and snow flakes, and sunlight, and moonlight, and starlight, and light of wide, wild storms, for in other places cobweb cloaks vanish away. If one is dressed in cobwebs and rainbow lights one mustn't change for velvet, for the cobwebs and rainbow lights are gone as one lets them go, and one never can find them again. And those who once sing songs of the lights of gay rooms can never sing the whip-poor-will songs any more, or the bobolink songs. Once they're gone away from the moss they never come back to dance on it quite in the same way again."

"It's queer that you should tell me that," said Marah.

XI

PLUMP, rosy Granny Minchot had come somehow to look little and grey and very old indeed. It quite frightened Marah that anyone could be all changed so suddenly. She had the look of being "all gone to pieces," as they say, where she sat, close over the fire in the stone oven. She had been trying to do her work, apparently, about the kitchen, and had given it up and sat by the fire, that was nearly out, hunched over it in a heap that seemed very little and forlorn, for all her tidy black dress and her white, stiff, frilled cap. She looked up when Marah and Paul Renshawe came in,—by the door that led over one step in from the forest moss and deep-laid leaves to the red brick tiles of the kitchen,—with the frightened look that very old people turn to sudden sounds. Her blue eyes were confused and dim. She did not stand up before Marah.

"I have brought a visitor to you," said Paul

Renshawe. "Here is your little Madame, come to see you, Anne Marie."

The old woman stared vaguely at them out of her faded, old blue eyes.

"Good-day, Anne Marie," said Marah, going over to her. "Are you not glad to see me, Anne Marie?"

"But yes, M'me l' Comtesse."

"How cold it is, Anne Marie. Your fire is going quite out."

"Yes," said the old woman.

"I'll build it up," said Paul Renshawe, cheerily, and the old woman let him do it, as she would not have dreamed of letting him do anything for her yesterday.

The blackbird in its cage at the window began to whistle as the flames leaped in the oven and the red and gold of them glowed out through the room.

"Isn't he happy!" said Marah, trying to rouse the old woman. "And how well your window pots do bloom for you, the geranium, and the mignonette, Anne Marie."

"Yes," said the old woman stupidly, "yes, M'me l' Comtesse."

"Our indoor flowers at the château," went on Marah, "are not half so fine. We do all we can for them, Madame Hélène and I, but we cannot make them bloom as your flowers do, Anne Marie."

Then quite suddenly, while Marah stood there, just when Paul Renshawe rose from making up the fire, the old woman, in her chair, sitting hunched over, looking very small and old and desolate, fell to sobbing. She sobbed as children do, heartbrokenly, with long sobs.

Paul Renshawe stood up from his building of the fire and said, "Now, Anne Marie, what is it, Anne Marie?"

And Marah besought, "What is it, Anne Marie? Anne Marie, what is it?" She bent over the old woman. She could have cried herself, everything seemed so sad. All her own dreariness went to the comforting of Granny Minchot. "Won't you try to tell me, Anne Marie, what it is?"

"Oh, M'me l' Comtesse," sobbed Anne Marie, "it is nothing at all; indeed it is nothing at all. But, oh, little M'me l' Comtesse, it is that I am old, old, old." She said it as if she had never known it before, as if being old were a thing that had suddenly come upon her, and that had never happened to anyone else in all the world. She said it as if it were a terrible thing that a comfortable, cheery peasant woman, of the quite past times, who could read only with much labour and could not write at all and had never had knowledge of anything beyond her kitchen door, should be grown old. "I am old," sobbed Granny Minchot, in her poor, little, comical tragedy. She had been old for a long time; it was droll that she never had known it. Her long little life had been very small in its content, and yet here in it was the greatness of tragedy.

Of a sudden Merah knew that nothing of life was so great as the smallness, the usualness, of tragedy, the absurdness of it. It was absurd that Granny Minchot should be breaking her heart because she was old, and that she herself, Merah,

should be breaking her heart because René had been annoyed, and was gone until Thursday to Paris. There was nothing she could say. She and Paul Renshawe stood quite helplessly.

The clock of the forest house kitchen ticked its loud old tick-tock, tick-tock. And Marah had an odd idea that the sound of it, absurd as it seemed she should think so, took on as it went,—tick-tock, tick-tock, on and on, as the minutes went and the days and the years, and as all the lives of all the people in all the world were going, tick-tock, tick-tock, on and on,—some ring of fatality and finality, some ring even of doom.

“I am old,” sobbed Annie Marie, “oh, M^{me} l’ Comtesse, and am come to the end of things. I am come to the end of things and I did not know it. But yesterday I did not know it. But yesterday it was that I thought of nothing, only the work of the house, M^{’sieu} the American’s coffee, and the letting alone of his room,—that he will not have me tidy, that I want to clean, and that he never will let me,—how I must not touch the writing table, and the dust so deep on it, M^{me}

l' Comtesse, or gather up the torn papers from the floor. Only yesterday I was doing things, as though I were to go on with them for ever. And then all of a sudden in the afternoon, just when I was sweeping out the dead leaves that the wind had driven in at the door, I knew, and I don't know why, M'me l' Comtesse, I just knew, how I was grown old. Like the brown leaves I was sweeping up, I was old, old, old."

She rocked herself back and forth as she said it. All her youth had been of drudgery, unbeautiful and dull. Her years had all dully, most ignorantly and uneventfully, gone on and on and on, as dull in their way of going as was the poor old kitchen clock's tick-tock, tick-tock. And yet it was like this, in sobs as heartbroken as the sobs of any beautiful woman of the beautiful world, that she was weeping herself, poor old peasant of the forest house, ill, really, over the sudden realisation of her growing old, of her having — the thing was done already — grown, as she said, old, old, old.

"I am old, M'me l' Comtesse," she sobbed,

shivering there, while the blackbird whistled, and Paul Renshawe's grand fire danced and sang, and the clock went on, tick-tock, tick-tock. "I am old, M'me l' Comtesse," she sobbed. "Perhaps I never was young. Always I had to work so hard that there was no time for things of youth. And I know I never was beautiful. But my old man thought I was. I saw my people die, M'me l' Comtesse, my mother first, with the priest there and peace in her soul; then my father, who thought of her when he was dying more than of what the priest said; and my son, father of young Minchot, who was of the new times, and clever, M'me l' Comtesse, most clever, and had no peace, who died afraid; and my little girl, who was very little and knew nothing of life and faded like a white flower; and my brother, who had been twice to Paris, and would not have the priest when he died. And I saw my good man die, M'me l' Comtesse, who had known the forest all his days, and had no fear, and had the peace; and yet other people of the forest I have seen go from it, M'me l' Comtesse. And there is left

only my grandson now, and he is a man and does not need me. He is clever, M'me l' Comtesse; all the new times are for him. He understands them. He can talk about the government. He can talk to people of their wrongs. For long I have known that he did not need me. But never, never until yesterday, when I was sweeping out the leaves that the wind had blown in, did I realise, M'me l' Comtesse, how I had grown old."

XII

RENÉ had said he would be back on Thursday,—probably.

It seemed to Marah that she simply could not endure the days between. If only he had not gone off like that, annoyed, and not telling her why.

All day in the forest house she had been worrying and worrying, while she did what she could for Anne Marie. It had seemed to her that the hours of even that first day would never pass. The big clock in the forest house kitchen had ticked and ticked.

Nor, it seemed to her, ever would pass the hours of the evening, when she read aloud to Hélène, up in Hélène's sitting-room. And there too there was a clock that ticked and ticked.

They were reading of Amadis de Gaule,—

Les promesses d'Amadis
Et les beautés d'Oriane,—

in some curious, difficult enough, old rendering of the story,—Marah never remembered whose it was.

As she read she had only the dimmest idea of what she was reading. She was listening all the time to the ticking of the clock on the old, high, carved stone shelf of the chimney. She had that queer sense, that she had had as a child, in the nursery over Washington Square, of the going on and on of things. The tick-tock sounded very loud in the shadowy room — tick-tock, tick-tock, and grew fateful, curiously, absurdly,—as absurd little things seem to grow fateful sometimes,—with a ring of doom, somehow, however absurdly, in it;—tick-tock, tick-tock, and with always the minutes, that went on and on, inevitably. She was thinking how queer and inevitable the ticking was that went on and on and on. She was thinking for how many people, in how many cruel night watches, through how many endless hours of endurance and strain — when because of one great thing that was too great, little things were become burdens — the tick-tock, tick-tock, of

some stupid little clock or other must have taken on that ring of fate, and knelled out all of the hopelessness of the going on and on. Her sense of that,— of the ring of doom in the tick-tock, tick-tock, that so many people, at one time or another of their lives, perhaps all people, had listened to, in the intensity of waiting, was a thing that could not be mocked away; tick-tock, tick-tock, and on and on and on, as all the people of the world were going; tick-tock, tick-tock, for the striving and stress and storm of some of them; tick-tock, tick-tock, for the waiting and waiting and waiting of others.

She read aloud to Hélène while the clock ticked. And she was telling herself as she read, that she was a most awfully stupid Marah. What on earth had she to be so intense about? René was gone to Paris, and Thursday he would come back. He had been annoyed for the moment, but that would pass, because there was no reason for his annoyance. It would pass, she told herself; it would pass, like all the things that went on and on and on —

On and on and on, tick-tock, tick-tock —

*Mais je vous promets ma foy, mon amy, si Fortune
ou nostre moyen ne nous monstre de bref chemin pour
satisfaire à nostre pais, que moy-mesme le trouveray
quoy qu'il en puisse avenir.*

Tick-tock, tick-tock, all the whole time as she read she was listening to the ticking of the clock that seemed to grow always louder in the room.

And always the forest winds sounded about the château walls. The voice of the winds made her think of the voice of the city that had sounded at the windows of the lumber room to the playing there of the violin; and of the voice of the sea that was between the woods of the old life and the forest here, that was around all the world, the sea of Daphne's dreams, and of the pine trees' hearing, the sea that Paul Renshawe had called the Sea Beyond. The sounding of the winds, like the sounding of the city and the sounding of the sea, was a thing very intense to her, whether happily or sadly, she did not understand.

Tick-tock, tick-tock —

The clock was a quite wonderful, heavily weighted, dark and strange old clock, sinister somehow, of the time when first clocks were made. The long, weighted chains clanked and rasped with the ticking, and seemed to Marah then to be measuring out the minutes in a sort of march macabre. On either side of the clock on the chimney shelf stood sombre, very old candelabra of wrought iron, that lifted their Miss Etticoats up tall and white and high, tipped with stars, against the dark panelling of the walls.

*— car il me seroit impossible de plus retarder
notre grand plaisir, et ainsi endurer et desier, ayons
de quoy nous esempter et estainder ce grand feu, qui
s'allume et croist d'heure à autre en nos cœurs.*

What was it all about anyway?— Tick-tock, tick-tock, on and on and on.— On and on and on, as all the people of the world were going, doing what they had to do, waiting, waiting, waiting, if so be it they had to wait;— tick-tock, tick-tock —

Làs, Seigneur Dieu, jusques à quand serons nous en ceste misere? Helàs, Mort que ne tardes-tu à secourir ceuz qui t'apellent pour leur dernier refuge!

Was that the way people came to think of life? Was that what death, by the teaching of life, came to mean to people? Was that what it all was to people, to all the people of the world as they went on and on and on?

Tick-tock, tick-tock.-

En bonne foy, respondit elle, mon Seigneur, la chose seroit bien difficile que je ne feroys pour vous obeir,—

And it was then that a footman came to the door, looking a little confused, and said there was one who would speak to Madame la Comtesse.

"How odd," said Marah, putting down Amadis. "What can it be? Why doesn't whoever it is come to me? Only you don't want anyone here, do you, Hélène? I'll go see what it is."

Down the gallery, well out of sight or hearing

of anybody, the man stopped and said, "That was not true, Madame la Comtesse, it is not one who would see Madame la Comtesse. It is a note I was asked to give to her without anyone's knowing of it. A rider came with the note just now, Madame la Comtesse."

Marah took it in much surprise. She never imagined its being from Talleray. René had not let her answer Talleray's last letters, and he, Talleray, had told her he was sure René had forbidden it, though she had always denied that, not wanting him to know of René's queerness about her friendship with him. However, in spite of René's not wanting him to write and not allowing her to answer, there need have been no such mystery about it. Quite wondering, she read the letter, there in the hall.

It was a very curious letter.

He said that he must see her, absolutely he must. At first she was only surprised, the tone of the letter seemed to be so sure she had expected it. He said he had not been able to get any word to her before, there had been so many difficulties.

Then as she read the letter through again she found herself much interested. And she was very much pleased too. Of course it was absurd of Talleray to make such a fuss, but she loved to be made a fuss about. She so wanted to be wanted by somebody, and especially just now when René had gone away annoyed like that, and not seeming to want her. Old Grandmother Minchot had wanted her. And Talleray wanted her. That he should want her gave her almost happiness. She had been so glad when poor old Anne Marie had wanted her that day. She could not help being glad too about Talleray. Moreover his letter amused her and roused all her curiosity. It was so odd. There was something, he said, that he must tell her. There was something he simply had to tell her, or he could not endure it. And there was something he wanted to ask her. In the letter he said he would find a way in spite of everything. Monday, he said, she should hear from him. He would get a note to her then, somehow. Until then would she think of him, he begged her, as of one who with all his heart and

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soul and mind and thought was devoted to her, and who counted the hours till again he might see her.

The rider, a groom from Marlay-le-Vieux, was waiting, her man said, and in the letter there was quite an imploring for some answer. "One word from you, little Marah," the letter said, "would make the days all different for me."

She was really quite grateful to him that he should care about her, and take the trouble, as he did, to let her know it. She was sorry that René had been rude to him. She wanted to make up to him for René's quite extraordinary rudeness, and to herself for his having gone off unreasonably like that. Her letter in answer to Gigi's was particularly "nice." She knew that René had not wanted him to write to her, and would have been annoyed at her answering the letter. But it seemed to her that he, René, was most unfair in that, and that if he would not let her explain things to him, talk things over with him, then things going as he didn't want was nobody's fault but his. Talleray's letter made her realise, some-

how, how unfair and unkind René had been, and how angry one ought to be with him. And so, because she was lonely, just then, a little, and not as happy as usual, and even more than usually glad that someone should bother about her, she made her answer to Talleray's letter especially "nice," told him how glad she had been to hear from him, and how one couldn't help feeling a little dull at the château sometimes, with René away and the weather all so sad.

She sent off the letter and went back to Hélène. She would have liked to tell Hélène quite all about it, but she could see that Talleray would not have wanted her to.

"What was it?" asked Hélène.

"I'd rather not talk about it, if you please," said Marah.

She went on reading aloud while the clock ticked on and on.

La chose seroit bien difficile, que je ne feroys pour vous obeir —.

But it was "bien difficile" the thing she had to do for René,— to wait.

XIII

THAT was Saturday night. Sunday dragged itself through after a fashion. There was Mass. Then she and Hélène walked up and down the terrace above the little river. Paul Renshawe came to breakfast. He said that Anne Marie was much more like herself, Marah's visit had done her good; would Marah go back with him again for a little in the afternoon to see her? She went back with him and spent an hour or more with the old woman, who was sitting up by the fire in the kitchen. Then she and Hélène walked up and down the terrace again for a little while, when the sun was yet there. And then came tea and dinner and the evening and good-night.

Next day, Monday, Talleray sent her a letter, as he had said he would, with the same odd making a mystery of it. The letter suggested a plan that quite amused Marah—a plan that she couldn't help thinking would be great

fun, however much it would annoy René.

Talleray said he would come over in his car tomorrow, Tuesday, and not come to the château — he would tell her why not when he saw her — but would wait for her at the Carrefour du Grand Bassin. He would be there at eleven of the morning, and if she would meet him there, then, without telling anybody, not anybody,— he would explain to her when he saw her, he said in the letter, why that was so important,— without telling anybody at all, they would go for just a little drive, if that were all she'd do, or,— if only she would, — for a long, glorious run across the forest and the fields to Vriez-le-Château. She really ought to see the château of Vriez, he said, and she would like the d'Arblonds, too, he was sure. René had not allowed her to meet them, but he, Gigi, of course did not know that. Gigi wrote that, if she cared to, they could have tea at the château or dine there. They would lunch at a little inn he knew on the way. And if Marah would be a "ripping good sport"— he wrote that in English — they would dine, not with the d'Arblonds,

but at the inn of the village, where one got quite the most delicious trout, and they would have the drive home by moonlight.

Of course she knew that René would not like it, but somehow that made her all the more decide to go; if René were annoyed with her for doing nothing, she might just as well do something. He had been annoyed without reason;—very well, then, one would give him a reason. He had been horrid about Gigi de Talleray. She would be a little horrid then too, if she chose. She did want to have the fun of it too. She adored the forest and the château and Hélène, and if only René had not gone off annoyed and left her to such worry, she would have asked for no more “fun” than just the being happy there, reading beautiful things with Hélène in a beautiful room, wandering in the forest, with all its beauty for her company. But René had gone off annoyed and had left her to a troubled waiting, not so happy but that this thing that Talleray proposed appealed to her. She sent him word that she would be at the Carrefour du Grand Bassin, and would not tell anyone, and

was ready for any plan he had, for the whole day.

She was looking forward to it immensely; she wished she could tell Hélène. She did hope it would be a good day to-morrow. She loved the motoring, she wanted to go to Vriez-le-Château. It would be such fun lunching on the way at the inn. She wanted to see the château, too, the stairs, and the salle of the mirrors that she had always heard about. She knew the d'Arblonds were amusing people, most admittedly clever and unconventional, as she liked people to be. She had often heard what fun they were. She thought that they, she and Talleray, would, as he had said, go for tea to the château and then dine at the inn of the village. She would love the drive back, too, in the night. She had never motored in the forest at night, and there would be an early moon.

The morning came all opal and gold to her windows. She had left the curtains open, as always, to get quite the first loveliness of the morning. She sat up in her big tapestried old bed while she drank her chocolate, and the firelight

played through the room, and she looked out to the opal and gold and pearl and azure morning, that lay upon the lawn, and upon the smoky, purple forest, where it closed in, holding the night yet, and she told herself how happy she was to be having the whole day out of doors in the beautiful world with Talleray, who was so kind, and such fun.

She was looking forward to it awfully, as she drank her chocolate, and as she dressed. She wrote a little note to leave for Hélène, saying she should be away all day and not telling why. She sang as she dressed and was very happy, looking forward to her day.

But just when she was starting there came a message from Paul Renshawe that changed everything. He sent her word from the forest house; — had got a woodsman who was passing with a load of fir trees in the road to take a hastily scrawled line to the château for her. She met the cart in the road just round the turn from the château, as she was starting to meet Talleray. The note asked her please to come, Anne Marie

was very ill, and was asking for her. Poor old Anne Marie was dying.

Afterwards Marah realised that she might at least have sent a groom with some message to meet Talleray at the Carrefour du Grand Bassin, but at the time she never thought about it. She was so troubled about Anne Marie that she thought of nothing else. She did not wait even to send Hélène word; — there was nothing Hélène could have done about it, and there was no use in telling her of a sad thing she could not help. She only ran down the Route Tournante as fast as she could go, past the Rocks that Wept and across the little Vriez, and never thought of Talleray at all. She never thought of him at all that day.

She stayed all day in the forest house, for Anne Marie was conscious all the time, and wanting her. Young Minchot was there, and Paul Renshawe, and two women — neighbours, though from far off in the forest — who were doing everything that had to be done; and the doctor was there, summoned over from the town on the edge of the for-

est, and the Abbé was there. But it was Marah that the old woman wanted.

She wanted Marah just to sit by her where she lay in the huge, dark, old four-posted bed, in the room across the passage behind the kitchen.

"Little Madame used to ask me to have coffee with her," she said to the Abbé. "She used to make me, me, old Anne Marie, sit at the table and drink coffee with her, as if there were no difference between us! Me, Anne Marie, and the little Madame."

Just before the Abbé gave her of the sacrament she was talking of that, of how little M'me l' Comtesse and she were used — she talked as if it were all very long ago — to have coffee together.

The blackbird whistled in the kitchen across the passage from the room where Grandmother Minchot was dying. She was dying just because she was old and had lived her life and was come to the end of it; dying quietly, without any pain, and without any fear at all. Two days ago she had cried, because when she was sweeping out the dead leaves that the wind had blown from the for-

est into the kitchen, she had realised suddenly that she was old. But now she did not weep at all, or seem to mind. She did not look nearly so old now, as she lay without her frilled cap, and with her grey hair all soft and smooth on the pillow, in the big, dark bed. She seemed to be not dying at all, but only growing sleepy, rather like a child. It seemed only a little odd that she should be so sleepy in the day time; that she, who had always been wide awake and hard at work, should lie sleepily in the dark old bed, when the room was full of sunshine. The fire burned bravely in the deep chimney, on the hearth stone that was set high above the floor under its wide, out-reaching stone hood. With the blackbird's whistling in the kitchen they could hear the clock there, ticking,—tick-tock, tick-tock. Everything was comfortable and usual in the sunny room.

The priest gave the last sacrament to the old woman. It seemed to Marah curiously simple and comforting; she should have thought to find the great words terrible, but they were not. They were just part of a beautiful comforting, like

comforting a little child, putting a little child to sleep.

She helped arrange the little altar, she covered the little table by the bed with clean, white linen, and placed the two candles on it and lighted their little blue flares in the sunshine. She was herself glad of the touch of the Holy Water from the branch of boxwood that one of the neighbour women had dipped in the bénitier. She knelt with the others while the Abbé anointed Anne Marie's eyes and lips and hands and feet with the Holy Oil, cleansing them of the sins they had committed. Anne Marie took of the Sacrament as if their giving it to her meant no great extremity, but as if it were the simplest, most quiet thing.

It seemed as if peace deepened in the room, and grew always deeper there, deeper and deeper, till quite the end. Marah had never before felt such a peace as that which remained in the room all day.

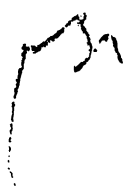
She had never before seen anyone die — Daphne had died alone, away from her — and it had seemed to her always that death must be very ter-

rible. If this were what it was, then it was just the simplest thing, the most natural thing, in all the world, and the thing of all the world least to be afraid of.

All the time as she sat by old Grandmother Minchot, she was thinking of Daphne. She was thinking that Daphne must have gone to sleep, like this, so quietly. The bitterness and the sting of *that* seemed to pass from her as she looked upon *this*. In the sunny room, where one smelled geranium and mignonette, and heard the blackbird whistling, and heard the clock, and the fire, and the forest whispering all softly at the window, the little old woman grew more and more sleepy, after the long, hard work of her days, and rested more and more.

And after a while it was that complete rest, good to look forward to at the end of things.

Paul Renshawe came and touched Marah's shoulder and said she had better come away. They went across the passage to the kitchen. It surprised her to find that it was quite dark. She had not noticed when the sun went. Afterwards



she could not understand how it was that it seemed to her as if the sunshine had lasted all day in the room where the poor old woman was dying, and as if there had been sunshine there all about her when she died. The blackbird was asleep in his cage. The fire was gone out in the stone oven. The clock was saying tick-tock, tick-tock, on and on. She looked at the clock and saw that it was half-past five. Paul Renshawe was lighting a lantern. One of the two women who had been there, helping, brought Marah a glass of wine, and Paul Renshawe insisted that she drink it. Then he put her cloak around her shoulders and opened the door and took her away from the forest house.

The forest was dark and still. The moon had not risen yet. At half-past five it was perfectly dark, between the early winter sunset and the later rising of the moon. The dark sky overhead was quite, quite full of stars. Marah and Paul Renshawe went along the wide road together. They could never have found their way by the Route Tournante in the dark, so they kept to the road, and came to the basin of the gold key.

Daphne's white birch tree glimmered against the dark forest, out of the dark forest, in the starlight. The four roads led their ways of the four winds. Marah stopped for a minute and stood looking along the dark road that the dawn would come from. She had some vague fancy of turning that way to the East as towards an altar. The road of the edge led to a wilderness of gold stars, and the altar way closed in only darkly. She said, "That way they will take poor, little old Anne Marie."

"Yes," he said, "it is that way that the graves are, blossomed all over, in the dream, you know, with those strange, little, white, starry flowers. Perhaps that is really the way over the edge, you know, to, not the end, but the beginning, of dreams."

He walked a little ahead of Marah for the rest of the way, to let the lantern light the road for her, and they did not speak again till they were come to the château.

The old porter, coming out from his lodge by the drawbridge, looked at them in so odd a way

that Paul Renshawe asked of Marah, "Can they have been worrying about you? Had you left any word about where you were for Hélène?"

"I told her I should be away all day," said Marah, and only then remembered Talleray. But it did not in the least matter.

Paul Renshawe went across the court with her. The entrance door of the château stood open. There was no one in the lighted hall, as they went in. Afterwards she knew that Paul Renshawe had felt what she wasn't in the least conscious of, the queer sense of there being something wrong, that was there somehow in the very air of the place. That was why — because he felt it — that he went with her along the hall and to the Watteau room, where most likely Hélène would be at that hour.

Hélène was there, they found, and Talleray and René too.

Marah stood in the door for a minute, looking rather stupidly at them all. Paul Renshawe was behind her. The other three were all standing, Hélène, with the black lace close about her face

and her beautiful hand clutching it tight. She seemed to have been walking the room up and down, and had stopped short in her poor, lame pacing of it when the door opened. She stood there, with her crutch, in an attitude curiously tense. The two men stood facing one another in a very odd sort of way. They all looked at Marah, and nobody spoke.

Marah went across to René.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

He did not answer her.

"Are you angry still?" she asked.

He still did not answer and she turned to Tal-leray.

"You are angry, too," she said. "I am sorry. I ought to have let you know, but I never thought. Did you wait long for me? I could not help it. Please don't you be angry too." She stood looking from one of them to the other. "You both seem so angry," she said. "How very queer. It seems so queer to come from death upon people who are angry."

"Marah," said René, "where have you been all

day?" His face was white and strange. If she had not felt so vague and confused about it all, she would have been afraid. "Talleray says you have not been with him. Is that true?"

"I am sorry," said Marah, "I meant to go with him, but poor old Anne Marie wanted me, and she was dying, and I forgot."

René flung himself around again to Talleray. "You lied," he said. "You vowed you had had no plan of meeting."

Talleray was not awfully good looking, as René was, but he had a certain distinction always, and it counted for more even than usual then. Marah felt it as if it were suddenly emphasised about him, brought out, as if by something that had happened, some sudden new understanding he had got to, she herself did not at all understand how. He was smaller than René, and pale, as René was. When René said, "You lied," two scarlet spots came to his cheeks, and one could see the blue veins stand out in his temples, and funny little pulses beating there.

"Yes, I lied," he said to René. He came a step

nearer and said, looking at René very tensely, "It seems she does not lie. Do you understand that? I, only in this instant, understand that. Try to understand that, René, and listen to what she tells you." He turned to Marah. "You tell him," he said.

It was very strange indeed the way he said it.

"Why, there isn't anything to tell," said Marah. "I suppose Gigi thought he had to tell a lie about it to keep you from being angry with me, René. But he needn't have, for I don't care. I knew you'd be angry. I knew, of course, you wouldn't like it, René, but you did not seem to like anything, anyway. And I'm awfully fond of Gigi. Gigi," appealing to Talleray, "you do know that, don't you? And I was so glad he liked me, René, and wanted me to do things with him. And I wanted to go, so I said I would. Only, then I forgot, because old Anne Marie was dying." She went over past René to Talleray. "Please don't be angry with me."

"Oh, Marah," he said, with something in his voice that she had never heard in it before. He

stood there looking at her as if he never had seen her before. It could have been only a minute, but it did seem very long. Then he looked past her to René. "You see it all now," he said, "don't you? There,—in what she said,—is what it is to her. In just what she said you can see the thing it was to her. And what it was, what I thought it was, to me, surely you can guess at. You know me and the world and yourself, René."

Again the two men stood looking in that strange way at one another.

"I don't understand," said Marah. "René, what does it mean? And why did you come back? You said you wouldn't come till Thursday."

"I was told a thing about you and Talleray," he said, "and I came back, and you were not here, and no one knew where you were; and Talleray, they knew he had come to the forest,—and what could I think?"

Queer little pulses were beating in René's temples too. It was queer how very white he was. And there were little pulses in the hollows of his cheeks, which seemed to have got to be strangely

hollow. It was as if the thing were great and terrible.

"And when he came to the château just now, asking for you, I thought, I thought—" And then it was to Paul Renshawe that he looked.

Paul Renshawe did not speak, only looked at him back again.

There was a queer moment of silence. The power of silence made itself felt very strangely in the room.

René said to Paul Renshawe, as if it were a quite horrible thing to say, "I thought it was a ruse to make it seem they had not been together."

Paul Renshawe only looked at him, and he turned again to Talleray, but without saying anything.

Talleray said to him: "Anyone would have thought it. And it would have been like that, only she is different. It is all because of her that it is not like that, not because of me. I am ashamed, René. I did not know."

"I am sorry," said Marah, stupidly, "but I don't seem to understand at all. Why did you

come to the château, Gigi, when you knew that René would not like it? ”

“ I had been waiting for you all day,” he said. “ I could not imagine what had happened.” Then he went on with it to René, leaving Marah quite out of it; “ I meant it to be,— to be just a thing of the world, you know. But, as I waited, I came to know that it was,— different. I do not know how to say this. Only I was troubled, differently, about her. And I came to the château. I could not stop myself from coming.”

“ I would have killed you,” René said to him.

“ I should not have cared,” said Talleray.

“ But what is it all about? I can’t understand it at all,” asked Marah.

And Hélène came to her and said, “ Don’t try to, my little Marah, it doesn’t matter. You are very tired. Don’t try to talk of it.”

She came with her crutch and put her hand on Marah’s arm.

“ Come away with me,” she said, “ and leave these two, who are both of them so wrong.”

She put her arm through Marah’s, and her

beautiful hand slipped into Marah's hand, and clung to it. Marah felt that she was trembling.

"Why, Hélène, darling, there is something really wrong,—what is it?"

But Hélène was looking at Paul Renshawe.

"You will put it right," she said to him.

"You will make them both understand, won't you, Paul?"

XIV

MARAH never really understood what it had all been about. It was quite a long time before she saw Talleray again. He went away just after that, from Paris and from France, and no one seemed to know exactly where he went or why. He had not even stopped that night at the château. She was troubled about that, and that he did not write to her. But when she saw him again, after quite a long time,—all of two years,—he was just as “nice” as ever, just as much fun, and more than ever her good friend. He was as glad to see her as she was to see him, and René was glad too, and there was no more confusion about it, and it all came, so, to be another very happy thing in her happy life; though at the time it made her really unhappy not to have seen him to say good-bye properly. She had been so tired and stupid that night.

Hélène had taken her to her room, and put her

to bed, as lovingly as had Bridget Quinn, in the old days, and had sat with her, as Biddy used to do, till she fell asleep. She had slept well, though there was a great wind all night in the forest, and she had heard it even through her sleep. It had a little troubled her in her sleep that there should be a wind like that the night poor old Anne Marie's soul was travelling on its way alone over the edge.

She waked in the morning with that dim sense one has, in coming out of the truce of the night, of there having been some troubling thing that yesterday had not finished, however far one seems in the night's quiet to have come beyond it. The great wind had died quite down, and Marah woke to a silence that was deeper even than usual in the room, a silence that seemed to have come in from the forest outside and to be soft and heavy.

The maid, Antoinette, who was very smart and yet very kind, brought her her breakfast tray, and lit a great fire, and threw back the curtains that Hélène had drawn last night,—and there

was snow falling, silently, white and soft and very silent, against the windows.

Marah, sitting up in bed, could look out from the windows and see, one way, the edge of the lawn all white, and the yew trees snow laden, and the balustrade of the lawn terrace there built up with a deeper white; and in another way could see the forest heaped white too, drawn close in, white and soft and silent, with the close pressing of the snow.

The warmth of the fire and the smell of it were delicious in the room, and the light of the fire was beautiful upon the tapestry and the dark old wood carving and in the age-treated, patiné, surfaces of things, and in the dim, green old mirror, that showed the room always a little mysteriously to Marah. It seemed to her strange that confusion and trouble and grief could be in so quiet, so lovely a place.

Antoinette made her put on a soft, little, turquoise blue silk and swansdown casaque, and tied a scarlet ribbon round her curly brown head. She sat up in bed sipping her chocolate.

Then René came in. He was quite dressed, just as he had been last night when he came from the Paris train and met Talleray, when Marah had come upon them so very confusedly. He looked odd and white and ill and much, much older than he really was, Marah thought.

"Why, René," Marah said, putting down her chocolate cup, "what is the matter? But, René, you have not been to bed at all! How queer of you! What has happened? What is it, René?"

"Marah," he said, standing at the foot of the bed, looking at her, between the looped-back, dark, old tapestry curtains, "Marah, will you forgive me?"

She sat curled up there, not speaking, just staring at him, for all of a minute, that seemed very long, not knowing at all what to say. It surprised her so. René, who was so proud and so fine and, sometimes, so inaccessible, was quite stupidly asking her to forgive him. It very much puzzled and confused her. She pushed her tumbled hair and the ends of the scarlet ribbon back out of her eyes. She wondered if he meant,—

could she forgive him, for his not letting her explain, and for his having gone away annoyed like that, and for his having been so odd last night and cross with her and with his cousin Talleray.

"I don't at all understand it," she said. "But whatever it was, it had no need to be, and don't let's bother about it any more. It is so very unhappy to bother about things, René, when one does not understand."

Her eyes filled with tears as she said it. She had been most unhappy. She had been as unhappy, for no reason, as the great people of tragic story are for great reason; she had not known why, and it was *that* that had made the thing so strange to her. She could not understand it at all, that sort of unhappiness.

"It seems to me so queer," she said, "not like the great things of life and love, and hunger and death, but just a making up of griefs, quite needlessly. We have so beautiful a life, René, why do we make a sad thing of it?"

She put the little, round, silver breakfast tray down on the stand Antoinette had brought, be-

fore she left the room, to the foot of the bed. She sat curled up in the bed under the tapestry curtains in all the sweet, soft confusion of lace pillows and linen and silk coverlids. She had drawn up her knees and clasped her arms around them, and she looked at René, out from under her curls, with her eyes dark and sad.

"I was so unhappy," she said, "about your being annoyed, and I was so lonely without you. It was very unhappy, and yet there seemed to be so little reason for unhappiness. I think, René," she said, "one must have had real knowledge of unhappiness to know the loneliness in which beautiful things hurt one as they hurt me in the days without you. I was so unhappy, René. And then I wanted to do what I knew you would not have liked, you see. And I am sorry, too, René. Will you forgive me, too?"

He came and stood close to her and said, "Little, little, little Marah,"—in the same funny way Hélène had of saying it.

She said, "Will you forgive me, René? I did, — or anyway I meant to do,— what I knew you

would not have liked. I knew, perfectly well, that you would not have liked my going off like that with Gigi for a whole day and coming home at night in the moonlight. And I knew you would not have liked my going to the château to tea with the d'Arblonds, and yet I meant to. I meant to do all the things I knew you would not like. And it was only because of poor old Anne Marie that I did not do them. Please, will you forgive me, René?" She held out her hand to him.

And he took her hand, and they both, for a very long minute, were there like that, holding one another's hands, and Merah was very happy, and was more sure than ever before she had been that he loved her, her prince of the far-away country.

She looked up at him, at first with her eyes full of tears, and then she laughed at him. And his face, that had been so queer and white and that had become haggard so suddenly, suddenly softened and grew happy too, as he laughed.

And they both were hungry,—she had left the chocolate till it was all cold. He rang for Antoinette, and they breakfasted together there, and

were happy. It seemed to Marah almost dreadful to be so happy as they were when there was sorrow in the world. But she could not help it. René was happy too, though he had had so horrid a night of being up and worrying, all for no reason.

He said that no breakfast ever in the world had been so good, and that no room of all the world was so delightful, and that nothing was so beautiful in all the world as the snow storm in the forest. He said that no ways of the world were beautiful like the forest ways, and that nothing of the world was so worth while as the one thing that, for him, the forest ways led to.

"You don't really like streets better than the forest paths, then?" asked Marah.

"Oh, no," he said.

"Nor the lamps of bright rooms better than stars?"

"No, no."

"Nor princesses dressed in jewels, better than just Marah?"

He said that of all the world he loved no one

but a little, wild forest princess in a cobweb cloak, and that he never would go away again without her from the forest, that belonged to her and that she must teach him to share with her. "It is your own forest," he said, "and you must show me how to be of it too, Marah."

She was much amused at that, and they drank their chocolate and crunched their toast, and were happy, and grew happier with every minute.

Afterwards they went out into the forest.

But before that Marah went up to Hélène's room.

Hélène had had a bad night too, like René. Marah, outside the door, knew that by the very sound of her voice answering the knock.

The room was quite dark except for the light of the low burning fire, when Marah went in. The curtains were drawn against the beautiful snowy day.

"You are ill, Hélène?" asked Marah.

"My head ached, but it is better," said Hélène. She was lying on the sofa in a long, darkly blue dressing gown.

Marah went over, across the firelight, and knelt down on the floor by her. "You did not sleep," she said, "was it my fault, Hélène? Was it because you worried about me yesterday? Did you stay too long with me, putting me to sleep last night? Were you too tired? You didn't go back to them afterward, did you, Hélène? To René and Talleray and Paul Renshawe?"

"Yes," said Hélène, "I talked for a long time after that with Paul Renshawe." Her face was hidden in the cushions of the sofa, as though the firelight troubled her. She put her beautiful hand out, groping blindly, and found Marah's hand. "Marah," she said, "I am glad Paul Renshawe is your friend. I am glad he has the reason that he has for loving you."

"Do you know the reason, Hélène?"

"Would you mind my knowing?" asked Hélène.

"I should be glad," said Marah.

"I am glad," Hélène said, "that he has kept faith always with that ideal."

"You helped him to, Hélène."

"If I did, I am glad," said Hélène. "I am

glad I have had that — the helping of him — once, even though he does not need it, my help, any more.” She laughed a little, very softly and kindly, as she lay with her face turned from Marah, even in the dark. “He does not need me any more,” she said, “now, for his dream again is secure to him. I love to think that I helped him keep it so. I did, oh, I know that I did, help him to keep it so. He has his dream and has no more need of me. For a little time though, he needed me to help him keep his dream. That was the happiest time of all my life. But now that he is safe, in the dream I saved for him, he has no more need of me. I gave him the best of my service, and I am glad that now, gone so far beyond me, he has no more need of me.” She laughed still, very softly, and not bitterly at all. She went on to Marah. “He will come sometimes, as the time goes,” she said, “to sit with me, or walk the terrace with me, smoking his pipe comfortably, content, after that fashion of his, don’t you know, that demands nothing of anyone; dreaming his dream there beside me, of the

one he loved, and for whom I have helped him save his dream, for whom I have helped him remain true to his dream. It's odd, isn't it? He will talk to me of the ideal that I, perhaps, a little, helped him to keep faith with. And he will read to me things he writes, that those people of the world, who most know, say are so wonderful, and that I shall not even listen to, thinking not at all of what he does, his work, his fame, because I think so very much of him. He'll knock the ashes from his pipe, tapping it against the arm of his chair, or against the terrace balustrade, and tell me beautiful things, and he will think I understand. And I never shall understand. He will count on me, depend on me, and I shan't understand. Isn't it funny?" Her laugh, that was not bitter at all, was happy, for all it was sad.

Marah thought of how always she had felt, even as a little girl, the strangeness of the way that happiness and sadness were confused together. She put her cheek against Hélène's hand as she held it, kneeling there. There was

nothing she could say. It was as it always had been when she felt a certain special tenderness and sympathy;—there was nothing she could say. She knew how it is always, that the more one feels the less one can say.

“I am so glad to have you, Marah,” said Hélène, after a while.

“Dear,” said Marah.

“But for dreaming, for unreal things, I quite forget the real things. Marah, I’m keeping you, and René is waiting.”

“We are going out in the snow,” said Marah. “I want to see the forest in the snow. I did so love the snow in the woods at home with Daphne. It was always then, just as the snow came, that I had to go to the city to my father.” And then she told of it. “Hélène, I am happier about her, Daphne, somehow, since yesterday. Yesterday, there in the forest house, with poor old Anne Marie, death somehow did not seem so terrible a thing. Somehow then I knew it for the peace which passeth understanding. It did not seem, then, terrible to me, only that—a peace passing

all our understanding. And so I came then, knowing that, to feel a little differently about my father. Perhaps some day I shall go and see him, and if he plays the violin for me, perhaps I shall better understand."

"I am glad you feel it so," said Hélène.

"I am glad about that too," said Marah, "and about everything. And I am so very glad about René. Hélène, do you know that René says he will not go away again from the forest — which is my forest, somehow, even more than his, for all his right of birth to it,—until I go with him? And, Hélène, he says that all the time we spend away from this will be just to make our coming back to it the happier. He says that he will not go away again until we both have to go together to Paris for the season, and then we shall keep coming back all the time to this our forest, that always he wants us to love best."

XV

SILENTLY, the snow was falling in the forest. How beautiful it was, down the long allées! It marked out the distances between the brown boles of the trees, very wide and far. It weighed down the branches of the pines. It made one think of Christmas trees and humble people, and children's shoes, and the Christ Child, and of all gentle, simple things, that yet led far, as to the infinite, as the star led to that poor manger which is so very great a thing of the world.

Marah and René walked together down the Allée Noire, the black allée that was all white, and the snowflakes gathered in Marah's hair; and René said they were lovelier there, ever so much more lovely there, than any diamonds could have been.

THE END









